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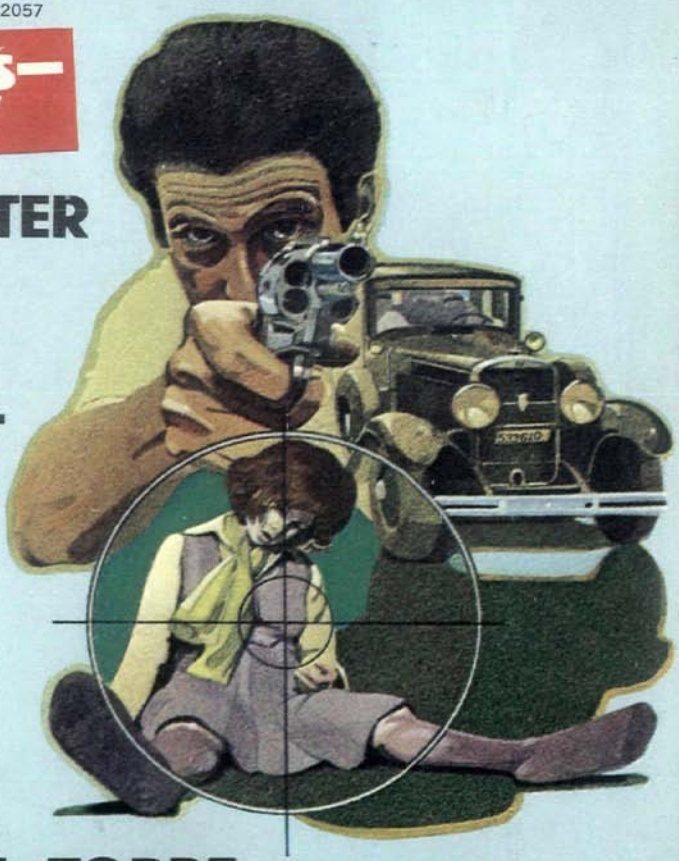

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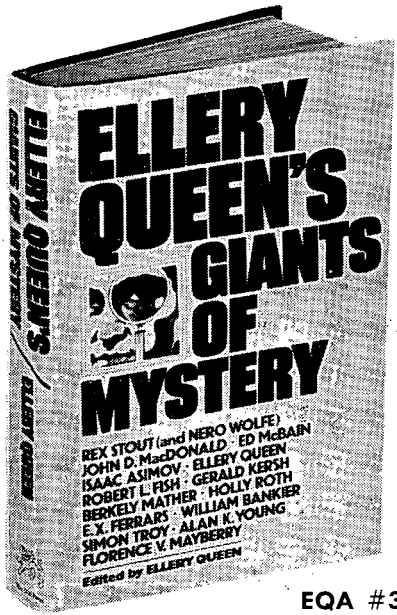
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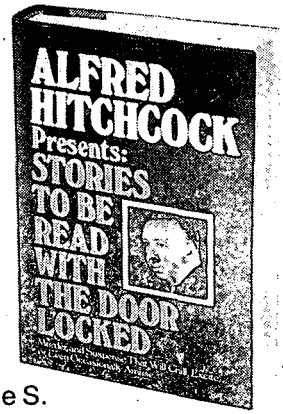

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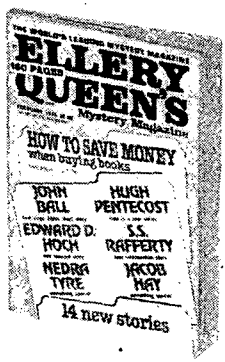

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EVAN HUNTER

Dream or reality? Can we always be sure? Thomas Barnes awakened in a strange room, a room he had never seen before—or had he? And the people—he had never seen them before either. Or had he? And his wife Annie—where was she? Dream or reality—in one or the other Tom Barnes had to find his wife . . . a gripping and fascinating novelet by the famous author of THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE, *and whom you also know as Ed McBain, the creator of the 87th Precinct stories . . .*

WHAT HAPPENED TO ANNIE BARNES?

by EVAN HUNTER

In the dream, or in the reality, I was on the roof of the Duomo in Milan. Gingerbread statuary laced the sky—I was surrounded by a forest of intricately carved stone. A girl in a yellow dress was leaning over the parapet, her back to me. And suddenly she lost her balance. I reached out, grabbed for the yellow cotton of her dress, and in a dizzying blur she fell over the edge. The piazza below was tiled in black and white, a geometrically patterned mosaic. The girl's scream shattered the torpid summer stillness as her body struck the tiles with bone-crushing force.

And in the dream, or in the reality, I saw myself racing down the circular stairs from the roof of the cathedral to the piazza below. A crowd was gathering outside and there was the sound of either a siren or another scream. Blurred images passed in miragelike heat; faces were too close to be distinct, voices distorted. An odd buzz hovered on the stifling air. The girl's broken body lay face downward on the black and white tiles. I heard the agonizing rise and fall of the ambulance siren as it came closer, closer.

There was silence now. And into the silence a rasping sound.

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The dream ended abruptly. I opened my eyes. Yellow drapes were being drawn back—the sound I'd heard was the sound of the pulley. There was blue sky beyond the parting drapes. I could hear the shrieking of gulls, the tumbling of distant surf. There were mullioned terrace doors and a craggy sun-washed landscape. I closed my eyes again. And opened them at once when I realized someone was in the room with Annie and me.

The man was in his late thirties. He was tall and brawny, his hair was black. He was wearing black trousers and a white turtleneck shirt, and he stood beside the drapes, working the pulley, as sunlight splashed wider and wider into the room. I sat up. I was surprised to discover that I was fully clothed—trousers, jacket, shirt, tie, socks, shoes. I was not in a bed, but on a sofa. Annie was not beside me, nor was she anywhere in the room.

Obliviously, the man kept pulling open the drapes, his back to me. The room was Moorish in design, large, with white stuccoed walls and hanging tapestries, colorful tiles and dark extravagant furniture, numerous closed doors, arches and balconies. I realized now that I was in a suite of some sort, but I couldn't remember which hotel I was in, or in what part of Italy. Everywhere in the room, there was evidence of a wild party the night before—whiskey bottles, soiled glasses, plates of leftover food, brimming ashtrays, a woman's satin slipper on one of the coffee tables. The slipper was not Annie's.

The man had turned from the terrace doors. He smiled at me and said, "*Buon giorno, signore,*" and then started around the room, picking up glasses, carrying bottles back to the bar.

"Can't you do that later?" I said, annoyed. There was a sour taste in my mouth, my head was pounding. To one of the closed doors I called "Annie?" and got no answer. The man was still clearing away the debris.

"I don't suppose you've seen my wife," I said.

"Sir?"

"My wife. Has she gone down for breakfast already, would you know that? Where *are* we, anyway?"

"This is the Villa Piontelli, sir."

I got off the sofa, stretched, yawned, and looked up at one of the balconies. "Annie?" I called again, and again got no response. "The Villa Piontelli," I said. "I don't remember checking in."

"It is not a hotel, sir."

"Then what is it?"

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"A private residence."

"Really? Whose?"

The man's eyebrows lifted in surprise. "Why, Signor Piontelli's," he said.

"This is his house?"

"His villa, yes."

"Is it on the road to Milan?"

"Milano? No, sir. Milano is a long way to the north."

"Then where are we?"

"This is a private island, sir. Near Sardegna."

"You mean Sardinia."

"*È la stessa cosa.* The same thing, sir."

"My geography may be off, but isn't Sardinia southwest of Rome? Out in the Tyrrhenian?"

"*Si, signore.*"

"What was that name again?"

"Piontelli. Marco Piontelli. You do not know the name?"

"I do not know the name."

"It is one of the most well-known names in Italy. Signor Piontelli owns Sistemi Italiani, it is the largest producer of—*ma come si dice?*—electronics? They make computing machines. He is the I.B.M. of Italy."

"I thought I.B.M. was the I.B.M. of Italy."

"Ahhh, good morning, Thomas."

The faintly accented voice startled me. I hadn't heard anyone coming into the room, but I turned now to find a man standing just inside the entrance door. He was in his late fifties, suntanned and handsome, with dark hair, graying sideburns, and brown eyes.

"I'm sorry we had to wake you," he said. "I thought it might be pleasant, though, if we all took lunch on the terrace. And since everything is still in such disorder from last night—" A look of sympathetic concern came onto his face. "Are you all right?" he asked. "You were complaining of a headache last night. I was hoping—"

"Last night?" I said.

"Yes, at the party."

"What party?"

"Thomas, let me explain," he said. "You seem not to remember—"

"Tell me," I said. The last time I'd drawn a blank this way had

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been three years ago, when Annie and I had gone to a midnight party on Montauk, and I'd awakened in Easthampton the next morning without the slightest recollection of how I'd got there. But nowadays I was drinking less; I told myself I was drinking less.

"I am Marco Piontelli," he said. "Surely you remember this, Thomas?"

I stared at him and said nothing. I was no stranger to hangovers, but last night's drinking must have been monumental. I could not remember this man who was addressing me so familiarly, nor could I imagine how I'd awakened on an island in the middle of the Tyrrhenian Sea, when I'd been driving north toward Milan all day yesterday.

Patiently Piontelli said, "We met at Cala di Volpe yesterday afternoon. Cala di Volpe—a hotel in Sardegna. You were sitting on the terrace, the one in the old section of the hotel, where the long wooden dock leads out to the yacht basin. You were alone. And you were drinking."

"Alone?"

"Alone. And you drank at the party last night as well. You drank quite a lot, in fact."

"Where?"

"Here at the villa. We talked a while at Cala di Volpe. I invited you to come back with me on the launch. You accepted."

"And my wife?" I said.

"Your wife?" A quizzical look crossed his face. His eyes shifted to the man who was still cleaning up the room. "Bruno?" he said.

"*Si, signore,*" Bruno replied. "*Mi ha domandato la stessa cosa.*"

"I'm sorry," Piontelli said.

I looked at him. I wasn't alarmed, not yet I wasn't; I was simply confused. Like so many mornings after nights before, I was trying now to pick up the pieces and put them together, without revealing just how vast a gap there'd been. "I assume she's around somewhere," I said.

He was staring at me now. "Why, no," he said. "No, Thomas."

"She's not here?" I said.

"She's dead," he said. "Surely you know this, Thomas. You told me yourself—"

The pain struck as suddenly and as powerfully as a clenched fist. I put my hand to my eyes, covering my eyes, and in that instant—as though fragments of the dream were triggered by the

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aching needles of pain—I saw behind my closed eyes a stretcher being lifted into an ambulance. A woman's bare arm hung limply over the side of the stretcher and I saw a portion of her yellow dress beneath the blanket covering her.

"Are you all right?" I heard Piontelli ask.

I suddenly lost my balance, and reeled back against the wall, clutching it for support.

"Bruno!" Piontelli shouted. "*Aiutami! Prendi i piedi.*"

They were lifting me. Bruno had my legs, Piontelli was supporting the upper portion of my body. As they struggled to carry me across the room, there appeared behind my tightly closed eyes the image of the girl in the yellow dress being wheeled down a long white corridor, nuns in black walking swiftly by her side. "Annie," I said, "where are they—?" and did not know whether I'd said it aloud or said it in my mind.

They were carrying me up the steps to the balcony. I heard Bruno and Piontelli whispering urgently to each other in Italian, and suddenly there was the vision of an operating table surrounded by men in green gowns and green masks, and the distorted sounds of heavy breathing. One of the surgeons removed his mask. His face was beaded with sweat. Slowly, deliberately, the surgeon shook his head, and I screamed, "No! No, it isn't true, no!"

They dumped me onto the bed. Piontelli looked over his shoulder. I tried to rise, but the pain was excruciating. Standing in the open doorway, I saw a slender man in a white linen suit. The man opened a black bag. A hypodermic needle flashed. Someone was loosening my tie. Bruno was shoving back the sleeve of my shirt. I tried to get off the bed again, but the needle was descending swiftly. The needle punctured my arm and I screamed "Annie!" again, then fell back against the sheets.

"*Thomas?*"

The voice was Annie's, the voice was a whisper.

"*Just a few more steps,*" she said, "*we're almost there. This way, Thomas, this way.*"

The stark white wall opposite the bed seemed to dissolve in a swirl of color, geometric shapes reassembling themselves in sharper focus. I recognized the interior steps of the Duomo in Milan, and heard Annie's voice again, "*Follow me, Thomas, follow me.*"

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And again, in dream or in reality, I did not know which, I was on the roof in blinding sunlight, and the girl in the yellow dress was moving ahead of me, her back to me, and Annie's voice echoed in clumsy, ungrammatical Italian, *"Come tutta bellissimo. Guardo, Thomas, i belli statue."* Everything went out of focus again, and on the wall or in my mind, in memory or in fantasy, a tall man in yachting cap and jacket approached, seemed to move from out of the wall into the room—though the room was no longer a room, it was instead a terrace overlooking a yacht basin—and the man was Piontelli, and he extended his hand and said, *"Excuse me, sir, but I saw you drinking alone and wondered if I might join you."* And now there was the sound of music, party noises, the laughter of women, the low conversation of men, the tinkling of ice in glasses . . .

The images faded.

I drifted off into sleep.

It was morning again.

I sat on the terrace in brilliant sunshine. The Milan newspaper was on the glass-topped table. The newspaper was three weeks' old. I looked at it again now. The banner read:

Ultima Edizione
LA NOTTE
Corriere Lombardo

The date beneath it was July 26th, the day after Annie and I had left Rome together. The story said that an American tourist named Anne Barnes had fallen from the roof of the Duomo at eleven o'clock that morning. She had been rushed to Ospedale Fatebenefratelli, where they had tried to save her, but she had died at 1:17 P.M. The newspaper reported that her husband, Thomas Barnes, had made arrangements for her to be buried the following day at Musocco Cemetery.

I had read the article over and again this morning, struggling with the Italian, had heard it translated aloud by Marco Piontelli; the truth was there in black and white as stark as the tiles in the piazza to which she'd fallen. And now I understood, or thought I understood, why I'd been drinking alone at a hotel I could not remember going to, three weeks after an accident I'd tried to forget. And could understand, too, why I'd accepted an invitation from a stranger, and had drunk myself into a stupor at his party that night.

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I looked out over the water. A white motor launch was moving closer in to the dock. Bruno and several other servants were watching its approach. Piontelli, a tiny figure from this distance, was coming down the wooden steps, waving at the launch as it maneuvered in. Lines were being thrown ashore now, a gangplank was lowered to the dock.

I watched as a tall slender woman in a summer dress came down the gangplank onto the dock, carrying a flowered parasol to ward off the intense rays of the morning sun. She embraced Piontelli, then arm in arm, seeming like doll figures from where I sat on the terrace, they started up toward the villa, Bruno and the other servants following behind them with luggage.

I sat in the sunshine and stared out at the water.

In a little while—I did not know how long, time no longer seemed relevant—I heard voices in the main room of the villa. Piontelli and the woman were moving toward the terrace now, chattering in rapid Italian as they approached.

"I Pucci vanno a tutta passata!" the woman said, and laughed. *"Un vero assedio! Sai che i prezzi risalgono in autunno, e cosi tutti li comprono adesso."*

"Thomas," Piontelli said behind me, "I would like you to meet my wife. Francesca."

I turned from the sea. The woman had auburn hair, cut close to the oval of her face; her eyes were blue, her mouth—

"Annie," I whispered.

"Mr. Barnes, how do you do?" she said, and extended her hand.

I was rising from the chair. "Annie," I said again.

"Madonna mia!" Piontelli said in alarm. "He thinks you are his dead wife."

I stared at them across the length of the terrace. The sun was merciless on my head. I could feel the pain starting all over again—I'd thought I was done with the pain last night when I'd learned my wife was dead. But this was Annie standing here beside Piontelli, her long auburn hair clipped short, yes, but the blue eyes unmistakable, the wide mouth, the tilted nose—*my* wife clinging to another man's arm and looking at me as though I were a total stranger.

I hesitated only an instant, gauging the distance to the beach and the dock. Then I took half a dozen long strides to where they were standing, shoved Piontelli aside, breaking her grip on his arm, and seized her wrist.

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"Mi lasci!" she screamed. "Are you crazy?" but I would not let go of her wrist. I dragged her down the steps and onto the beach. She kept trying to pull herself free, turning to shout back to the terrace for help. On the dock far ahead I saw Bruno and several other men running toward us on the wooden planking.

I reversed direction abruptly. There was a pebble-strewn path ahead, leading up off the beach at a sharp angle to an overhanging rock ledge. She tried to free herself again as I pulled her up the path, pebbles scattering beneath our feet. She fell and scraped her knee, and I yanked her to her feet again, and we struggled to the top of the ledge. Exhausted, we crouched behind a boulder overlooking the beach.

In the distance I could see Piontelli and Bruno in agitated conversation with two other men. I had still not released her wrist. The fight seemed to have gone out of her, but her blue eyes were angry and . . . frightened? Was that fear in her eyes? Was she afraid of *me*, her husband?

"Annie," I said, "I don't know what—"

"I am *not* Annie," she said, and pulled herself free of my grip. "Will you please take me back to my husband?"

"I *am* your husband."

"My husband is Marco Piontelli," she said, "I am Francesca Di Luca Piontelli."

"Listen—"

"I am listening, Mr. Barnes."

"Try to understand—"

"I am trying to understand."

"We came to Italy together—"

"I was *born* in Italy!"

"—at the beginning of July."

"This is pointless."

We fell silent. I kept studying her face. Overhead a gull shrieked.

"Who are you?" I said.

"I have already told you."

"Tell me again."

"Why?"

"Because . . . if you're *not* my wife, then she's dead and buried in Milan. And I have to learn if . . . if that's true, I . . . I can't turn every corner in the world and expect to find her there each time."

We were silent again. She studied my face with genuine sympa-

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thy now, and when she spoke again, her voice was gentle.
"I am Francesca Di Luca Piontelli," she said.
"Where do you live?"
"This winter I will live in Rome. With my husband."
"Where?"
"*A Via Gregoriana. Ma solo in inverno. In estate—*"
"Where'd you learn Italian?"
"In my cradle. I am Italian."
"And English?"
"In school. Also, I have been to America many times."
"When's your birthday?"
"March eleventh."
"Are you sure it isn't May sixth?"
"You wanted to know," she said, "and so I am telling you. Why do you persist—?"
"Where do I work?"
"I have no idea."
"What's your mother's name?"
"Bianca Di Luca."
"Wasn't your mother a woman named Beth McCauley?"
"Of course not."
"Where's your mother now?"
"Dead."
"When did she die, Annie?"
"She was killed in an American air raid on Rome. When I was still a child."
"And your father?"
"He was killed at the same time."
"Then you're alone."
"I am not alone," she said. "I have Marco."
"How long have you been married to him?"
"We were married last month."
"When last month?"
"On July twenty-seventh."
"Where?"
"In Rome."
I searched her face again, and suddenly I kissed her. She did not resist my kiss. Slowly we pulled apart. I looked into her eyes. They were vacant. I rose swiftly and walked down the rocky path to the beach, and did not look back even once at the woman I knew was my wife. . .

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The plane for Milan left Olbia at 11:30. In the piazza outside the Duomo I stood in stifling heat and looked up at the cathedral. The piazza was nearly deserted. Scaffolding was in place along the buttressed walls where repairs were being made. I squinted up painfully at the spires on the roof, then walked toward the wide steps leading to the entrance doors. The interior of the church was cool and dim. The sexton who led me up to the roof was puffing hard as we made the long climb.

"I was not actually here on the day of the accident," he said over his shoulder, "but I am told the Americans went to the roof early in the morning."

Behind him I had begun to sweat. I had never been inside this church before, yet it seemed shockingly familiar to me.

"One hundred and fifty-eight steps to the first roof," the sexton said, "two hundred and sixty-one to the Tiburium, five hundred to the terrace of the highest spire—"

The memory was sharp. The sexton's broken English yielded to the lilt of Annie's voice and I could hear it clearly now as we continued to climb: *"Just a few more steps, we're almost there. This way, Thomas."*

"There are a hundred and thirty-five arcs here," the sexton said, "all adorned with marble intaglios—"

"Follow me, Thomas," she said, *"follow me."*

"A strange and wondrous fairyland overlooking the city that Our Lady dominates—"

"Come tutte bellissimo. Guardo, Thomas, i belli statue."

And I remembered, I remembered saying, *"Be careful, Annie. You're getting too close to the edge there,"* and she said excitedly, *"Look, Thomas, look!"* and I shouted in alarm, *"Annie, be careful!"*

"This is the spot where the woman fell over," the sexton said.

"I know," I answered.

And at the Musocco Cemetery I found her grave, and I looked down at the inscription on the tombstone. ANNE MCCAULEY BARNES, it read, and it gave the date of her birth, and it recorded the date of her death as July 26, the day after we left Rome.

I had never been here before, and yet as I stared at the chiseled letters I could hear a priest's voice intoning, *"Ut in te semper cum Sanctio tuis sine fine laetetur. Per Christum Dominum nostrum,"* and into my mind, unbidden, came a memory so vivid it could not be defined—a coffin poised on canvas straps, waiting to be low-

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ered into the ground, five people standing around the open grave—the priest, an altar boy, two gravediggers, and me.

"Amen," the priest said.

"Amen," we responded.

The priest sprinkled the coffin and the grave with holy water. The altar boy handed him a thurible, and the priest incensed the grave and the coffin, and then chanted, *"Piae recrodationis affectu, fratres carissimi, commemorationem facimus sororis nostrae . . ."*

I opened my eyes. It had happened, I could remember it happening. I walked swiftly from the grave.

At the hospital I felt I knew the man to whom I was speaking, felt I had seen him or someone very like him removing a green surgical mask from his beaded face and shaking his head in surrender to death. The man was seated behind a desk now, wearing a business suit, filling a pipe as he spoke. His name was Dr. Paolo Corradino.

"There was, of course, nothing to be done," he said. "We tried, but—" He shook his head as he had done so often in my memory. "It was miraculous that she was still alive when they brought her here. She had fallen—how many meters from the roof? Impossible. But we tried." He shook his head again, "She was buried the next day at Musocco. Such a young woman." He started to light his pipe, then looked up at me. "What is your interest, *signore*?" he asked. "Are you another reporter?"

"I thought you knew," I said. "I'm her husband."

The hand holding the match hesitated. The doctor looked at me, then said, "*Signore,* there have been many reporters here since the accident. I have always told them the truth of what happened. There is no need for deception now." He lighted the pipe. Clouds of smoke enveloped his head.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I mean, *signore,* that I spent many hours with the husband of Anne Barnes." He paused. "And he was *not* you."

The plane from Milan did not arrive in Rome till almost four o'clock. At the Alitalia counter I asked an attendant where I might find information about a marriage that had taken place last month, and he advised me to ask any cab driver for the Anagrafe.

The building was ancient, the lobby thronged with people. There was no air conditioning. Instead, there was a mix of claus-

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trophobic heat and voices raised in tedious inquiry. The room on the second floor of the building was cavernous and dusty. Rotating fans hung from the ceiling, attempting vainly to rearrange the contained heat of the day.

I followed a clerk between rows and rows of filing cabinets, each marked with an identifying cardboard placard on its top surface. "We have all records here of people living Rome," he explained. "Or people born somewhere Italy, then move to Rome. Everything here. Born, die, marry, everything."

He located the file cabinet he wanted, and began leafing through yellowed cards. "Piontelli, Piontelli," he intoned. "Piontelli, Carlo. Piontelli, Luigi. *Ah, finalmente.* Piontelli, Marco." He pulled out the card and translated it aloud for me. "Born Palermo, 1916. Marry Regian Forza, Switzerland, 1939. Second marry—" He raised his eyebrows. "Karin Wehler, Germany, 1943."

"And the third marriage?"

"Two is not enough? In Italy two is miracle. Must be important man, Piontelli." He shook his head. "There is no third marry."

"Are you sure?"

"Cĕrto, signore."

"He's supposed to have married a woman named Francesca Di Luca last month. On July twenty-seventh. Is there any way we can check further?"

"Francesca Di Luca," the clerk said, and sighed. *"Vieni."*

I followed him down the aisle. He stopped at another cabinet, opened a drawer, and began scanning cards again. "Di Luca, Di Luca," he said. *"Ci sono molti Di Luca, signore,* many Di Luca, is common name Italy. *Ah, eccolà!"* he said, and pulled out a card. "Francesca Di Luca." He read the card silently, then translated it. "Born Palermo, 1918. Die Rome January second—"

"Died?"

"Die Rome, *si,"* he said. "January second." He looked up from the card. *"Mille novecento trentasette."* He paused. In translation he said, "1937."

(continued on page 69)

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a HARLEY QUIN detective story by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

One of the best of Agatha Christie's stories about the mystical and mysterious Harley Quin . . . how Mr. Satterthwaite, a looker-on at life, and Colonel Melrose, Chief Constable of the county, and Mr. Quin, the man who appears out of nowhere, met at a crossroads and joined forces to investigate a murder that is "English to the core" . . .

THE LOVE DETECTIVES

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

Little Mr. Satterthwaite looked thoughtfully across at his host. The friendship between these two men was an odd one. The colonel was a simple country gentleman whose passion in life was sport. The few weeks he spent perforce in London, he spent unwillingly.

Mr. Satterthwaite, on the other hand, was a town bird. He was an authority on French cooking, on ladies' dress, and on all the latest scandals. His passion was observing human nature, and he was an expert in his own special line—that of an onlooker at life.

It would seem, therefore, that he and Colonel Melrose would have little in common, for the colonel had no interest in his neighbors' affairs, and a horror of any kind of emotion. The two men were friends mainly because their fathers before them had been friends. Also they knew the same people and had reactionary views about *nouveaux riches*.

It was about half-past seven. The two men were sitting in the colonel's comfortable study, and Melrose was describing a run of the previous winter with a keen hunting man's enthusiasm. Mr. Satterthwaite, whose knowledge of horses consisted chiefly of the time-honored Sunday morning visit to the stables which still are an adjunct of old-fashioned country houses, listened with his invariable politeness.

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The sharp ringing of the telephone interrupted Melrose. He crossed to the table and took up the receiver.

"Hello. Yes, Colonel Melrose speaking. What's that?"

His whole demeanor altered—it became stiff and official. It was the magistrate speaking now, not the sportsman.

He listened for some moments, then said laconically, "Right, Curtis, I'll be over at once."

He replaced the receiver and turned to his guest.

"Sir James Dwighton has been found in his library—he was murdered."

"What?"

Mr. Satterthwaite was startled—thrilled.

"I must go over to Alderway at once. Care to come with me?"

Mr. Satterthwaite remembered that the colonel was chief constable of the county.

"If I won't be in the way—"

"Not at all. That was Inspector Curtis telephoning. Good honest fellow, but no brains. I'd be glad if you would come with me, Satterthwaite. I've got an idea this is going to turn out a nasty business."

"Have they caught the fellow who did it?"

"No," replied Melrose shortly.

Mr. Satterthwaite's trained ear detected a *nuance* of reserve behind the curt negative. He began to go over in his mind all that he knew of the Dwightons.

A pompous old fellow, the late Sir James, brusque in his manner. A man who might easily make enemies. Veering on 60, with grizzled hair and a florid face. Reputed to be tightfisted in the extreme.

His mind went on to Lady Dwighton. Her image floated before him, young, auburn-haired, slender. He remembered various rumors, hints, odd bits of gossip. So that was it, that was why Melrose looked so glum. Then he pulled himself up—his imagination was running away with him.

Five minutes later Mr. Satterthwaite took his place beside his host in the latter's little two-seater and they drove off together into the night.

The colonel was a taciturn man. They had gone a mile and a half before he spoke. Then he jerked out abruptly, "You know 'em, I suppose?"

"The Dwightons? I know all about them, of course." Who was

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there Mr. Satterthwaite didn't know all about? "I've met him once, I think, and her rather oftener."

"Pretty woman," said Melrose.

"Beautiful!" declared Mr. Satterthwaite.

"Think so?"

"A pure Renaissance type," declared Mr. Satterthwaite, warming up to his theme. "She acted in those theatricals—the charity *matinée*, you know, last spring. I was very much struck. Nothing modern about her—a pure survival. One can imagine her in the Doge's palace, or as Lucretia Borgia."

The colonel let the car swerve slightly, and Mr. Satterthwaite came to an abrupt stop. He wondered what fatality had brought the name of Lucretia Borgia to his tongue. Under the circumstances—

"Dwighton was not poisoned, was he?" he asked abruptly.

Melrose looked at him sideways, somewhat curiously.

"Why do you ask that, I wonder?" he said.

"Oh, I—I don't know." Mr. Satterthwaite was flustered. "I—it just occurred to me."

"Well, he wasn't," said Melrose gloomily. "If you want to know, he was crashed on the head."

"With a blunt instrument," murmured Mr. Satterthwaite, nodding his head sagely.

"Don't talk like a damned detective story, Satterthwaite. He was hit on the head with a bronze figure."

"Oh," said Satterthwaite, and relapsed into silence.

"Know anything of a chap called Paul Delangua?" asked Melrose after a minute or two.

"Yes. Good-looking young fellow."

"I daresay women would call him so," growled the colonel.

"You don't like him?"

"No, I don't."

"I should have thought you would have. He rides extremely well."

"Like a foreigner at the horse show. Full of monkey tricks."

Mr. Satterthwaite suppressed a smile. Poor old Melrose was so very British in his outlook. Agreeably conscious himself of a cosmopolitan point of view, Mr. Satterthwaite was able to deplore the insular attitude toward life.

"Has he been down in this part of the world?" he asked.

"He's been staying at Alderway with the Dwightons. The rumor

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goes that Sir James kicked him out a week ago."

"Why?"

"Found him making love to his wife, I suppose. What the hell—"

There was a violent swerve and a jarring impact.

"Most dangerous crossroads in England," said Melrose. "All the same, the other fellow should have sounded his horn. We're on the main road. I fancy we've damaged him rather more than he has damaged us."

He sprang out. A figure alighted from the other car and joined him. Fragments of speech reached Satterthwaite.

"Entirely my fault, I'm afraid," the stranger was saying. "But I do not know this part of the country very well, and there's absolutely no sign of any kind to show you're coming onto the main road."

The colonel, mollified, replied suitably. The two men bent together over the stranger's car which a chauffeur was already examining. The conversation became highly technical.

"A matter of half an hour, I'm afraid," said the stranger. "But don't let me detain you. I'm glad your car escaped injury as well as it did."

"As a matter of fact—" the colonel was beginning, but he was interrupted.

Mr. Satterthwaite, seething with excitement, hopped out of the car with a birdlike action and seized the stranger warmly by the hand.

"It *is!* I thought I recognized the voice," he declared excitedly. "What an extraordinary thing. What a very extraordinary thing."

"Eh?" said Colonel Melrose.

"Mr. Harley Quin. Melrose, I'm sure you've heard me speak many times of Mr. Quin?"

Colonel Melrose did not seem to remember the fact, but he assisted politely at the scene while Mr. Satterthwaite was chirruping gaily on.

"I haven't seen you—let me see—"

"Since the night at the Bells and Motley," said the other quietly.

"The Bells and Motley, eh?" said the colonel.

"An inn," explained Mr. Satterthwaite.

"What an odd name for an inn."

"Only an old one," said Mr. Quin. "There was a time, re-

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member, when Bells and Motley were more common in England than they are nowadays."

"I suppose so; yes, no doubt you are right," said Melrose.

He blinked. By a curious effect of light—the headlights of one car and the red taillight of the other—Mr. Quin seemed for a moment to be dressed in motley himself. But it was only the light.

"We can't leave you here stranded on the road," continued Mr. Satterthwaite. "You must come along with us. There's plenty of room for three, isn't there, Melrose?"

"Oh, rather."

But the colonel's voice was a little doubtful.

"The only thing is," he remarked, "the job we're on. Eh, Satterthwaite?"

Mr. Satterthwaite stood stock-still. Ideas leaped and flashed over him. He positively shook with excitement.

"No," he cried. "No, I should have known better! There is no chance where you are concerned, Mr. Quin. It was not an accident that we all met tonight at the crossroads."

Colonel Melrose stared at his friend in astonishment. Mr. Satterthwaite took him by the arm.

"You remember what I told you—about our friend Derek Capel? The motive for his suicide, which no one could guess? It was Mr. Quin who solved that problem—and there have been others since. He shows you things that are there all the time, but which you haven't seen. He's marvelous."

"My dear Satterthwaite, you are making me blush," said Mr. Quin, smiling. "As far as I can remember, these discoveries were all made by you, not by me."

"They were made because you were there," said Mr. Satterthwaite with intense conviction.

"Well," said Colonel Melrose, clearing his throat uncomfortably. "We mustn't waste any more time. Let's get on."

He climbed into the driver's seat He was not too well pleased at having the stranger foisted on him through Mr. Satterthwaite's enthusiasm, but he had no valid objection to offer, and he was anxious to get on to Alderway.

Mr. Satterthwaite urged Mr. Quin in next, and himself took the outside seat. The car was a roomy one and took three without undue squeezing.

"So you are interested in crime, Mr. Quin?" said the colonel, doing his best to be genial.

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"No, not exactly in crime."

"What, then?"

Mr. Quin smiled. "Let us ask Mr. Satterthwaite. He is a very shrewd observer."

"I think," said Satterthwaite slowly, "I may be wrong, but I think that Mr. Quin is interested in—lovers."

He blushed as he said the last word, which is one no Englishman can pronounce without self-consciousness. Mr. Satterthwaite brought it out apologetically, and with an effect of inverted commas.

"By gad!" said the colonel, startled and silenced.

He reflected inwardly that this seemed to be a very rum friend of Satterthwaite's. He glanced at him sideways. The fellow looked all right—quite a normal young chap. Rather dark, but not at all foreign-looking.

"And now," said Satterthwaite importantly, "I must tell you all about the case."

He talked for some ten minutes. Sitting there in the darkness, rushing through the night, he had an intoxicating feeling of power. What did it matter if he were only a looker-on at life? He had words at his command, he was master of them, he could string them to a pattern—a strange Renaissance pattern composed of the beauty of Laura Dwighton, with her white arms and red hair—and the shadowy dark figure of Paul Delangua, whom women found handsome.

Set that against the background of Alderway—Alderway that had stood since the days of Henry VII, and some said before that. Alderway that was English to the core, with its clipped yew, and its old beak barn and the fishpond, where monks had kept their carp for Fridays.

In a few deft strokes he had etched in Sir James, a Dwighton who was a true descendant of the old De Wittons, who long ago had wrung money out of the land and locked it fast in coffers, so that whoever else had fallen on evil days, the masters of Alderway had never become impoverished.

At last Mr. Satterthwaite ceased. He was sure, had been sure all along, of the sympathy of his audience. He waited now for the word of praise which was his due. It came.

"You are an aritist, Mr. Satterthwaite."

"I—I do my best." The little man was suddenly humble.

They had turned in at the lodge gates some minutes ago. Now

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the car drew up in front of the doorway, and a police constable came hurriedly down the steps to meet them.

"Good evening, sir. Inspector Curtis is in the library."

"Right."

Melrose ran up the steps followed by the other two. As the three of them passed across the wide hall, an elderly butler peered from a doorway apprehensively. Melrose nodded to him.

"Evening, Miles. This is a sad business."

"It is, indeed," the other quavered. "I can hardly believe it, sir; indeed I can't. To think that anyone should strike down the master."

"Yes, yes," said Melrose, cutting him short. "I'll have a talk with you presently."

He strode on to the library. There a big soldierly-looking Inspector greeted him with respect.

"Nasty business, sir. I have not disturbed things. No fingerprints on the weapon. Whoever did it knew his business."

Mr. Satterthwaite looked at the bowed figure sitting at the big writing table, and looked hurriedly away again. The man had been struck down from behind, a smashing blow that had crashed in the skull. The sight was not a pretty one.

The weapon lay on the floor—a bronze figure about two feet high, the base of it stained and wet. Mr. Satterthwaite bent over it curiously.

"A Venus," he said softly. "So he was struck down by Venus."

He found food for poetic meditation in the thought.

"The windows," said the Inspector, "were all closed and bolted on the inside."

He paused significantly.

"Making an inside job of it," said the chief constable reluctantly. "Well—well, we'll see."

The murdered man was dressed in plus fours, and a bag of golf clubs had been flung untidily across a big leather couch.

"Just come in from the links," explained the Inspector, following the chief constable's glance. "At five fifteen, that was. Had tea brought here by the butler. Later he rang for his valet to bring him down a pair of soft slippers. As far as we can tell, the valet was the last person to see him alive."

Melrose nodded, and turned his attention once more to the writing table.

A good many of the ornaments had been overturned and bro-

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ken. Prominent among these was a big dark enamel clock, which lay on its side in the very center of the table.

The Inspector cleared his throat.

"That's what you might call a piece of luck, sir," he said. "As you see, it's stopped. *At half-past six*. That gives us the time of the crime. Very convenient."

The colonel was staring at the clock.

"As you say," he remarked. "Very convenient." He paused a minute, and then added, "Too damned convenient! I don't like it, Inspector."

He looked around at the other two. His eye sought Mr. Quin's with a look of appeal in it.

"Damn it all," he said. "It's too neat. You know what I mean. Things don't happen like that."

"You mean," murmured Mr. Quin, "that clocks don't fall like that?"

Melrose stared at him for a moment, then back at the clock, which had that pathetic and innocent look familiar to objects which have been suddenly bereft of their dignity. Very carefully Colonel Melrose replaced it on its legs again. He struck the table a violent blow. The clock rocked, but it did not fall. Melrose repeated the action, and very slowly, with a kind of unwillingness, the clock fell over on its back.

"What time was the crime discovered?" demanded Melrose.

"Just about seven o'clock, sir."

"Who discovered it?"

"The butler."

"Fetch him in," said the chief constable. "I'll see him now. Where is Lady Dwighton, by the way?"

"Lying down, sir. Her maid says that she's prostrated and can't see anyone."

Melrose nodded, and Inspector Curtis went in search of the butler. Mr. Quin was looking thoughtfully into the fireplace. Mr. Satterthwaite followed his example. He blinked at the smoldering logs for a minute or two, and then something bright caught his eye lying in the grate. He stopped and picked up a little sliver of curved glass.

"You wanted me, sir?"

It was the butler's voice, still quavering and uncertain. Mr. Satterthwaite slipped the fragment of glass into his waistcoat pocket and turned round.

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The old man was standing in the doorway.

"Sit down," said the chief constable kindly. "You're shaking all over. It's been a shock to you, I expect."

"It has indeed, sir."

"Well, I won't keep you long. Your master came in just after five, I believe?"

"Yes, sir. He ordered tea to be brought to him here. Afterward, when I came to take it away, he asked for Jennings to be sent to him—that's his valet, sir."

"What time was that?"

"About ten minutes past six, sir."

"Yes—well?"

"I sent word to Jennings, sir. And it wasn't till I came in here to shut the windows and draw the curtains at seven o'clock that I saw—"

"Yes, yes, you needn't go into all that. You didn't touch the body, or disturb anything, did you?"

"Oh! No indeed, sir! I went as fast as I could go to the telephone to ring up the police."

"And then?"

"I told Janet—her ladyship's maid, sir—to break the news to her ladyship."

"You haven't seen your mistress at all this evening?"

Colonel Melrose put the question casually enough, but Mr. Satterthwaite's keen ears caught anxiety behind the words.

"Not to speak to, sir. Her ladyship has remained in her own apartment since the tragedy."

"Did you see her before?"

The question came sharply, and everyone in the room noted the hesitation before the butler replied.

"I—I just caught a glimpse of her, sir, descending the staircase."

"Did she come in here?"

Mr. Satterthwaite held his breath.

"I—I think so, sir."

"What time was that?"

You might have heard a pin drop. Did the old man know, Mr. Satterthwaite wondered, what hung on his answer?

"It was just upon half-past six, sir."

Colonel Melrose drew a deep breath.

"That will do, thank you. Just send Jennings, the valet, to me, will you?"

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Jennings answered the summons with promptitude. A narrow-faced man with a catlike tread. Something sly and secretive about him.

A man, thought Mr. Satterthwaite, who would easily murder his master if he could be sure of not being found out.

He listened eagerly to the man's answers to Colonel Melrose's questions. But his story seemed straightforward enough. He had brought his master down some soft slippers and removed the brogues.

"What did you do after that, Jennings?"

"I went back to the stewards' room, sir."

"At what time did you leave your master?"

"It must have been just after a quarter past six, sir."

"Where were you at half-past six, Jennings?"

"In the stewards' room, sir."

Colonel Melrose dismissed the man with a nod. He looked across at Curtis inquiringly.

"Quite correct, sir, I checked that up. He was in the stewards' room from about six twenty until seven o'clock."

"Then that lets him out," said the chief constable a trifle regretfully. "Besides, there's no motive."

They looked at each other.

There was a tap at the door.

"Come in," said the colonel.

A scared-looking lady's maid appeared.

"If you please, her ladyship has heard that Colonel Melrose is here and she would like to see him."

"Certainly," said Melrose. "I'll come at once. Will you show me the way?"

But a hand pushed the girl aside. A very different figure now stood in the doorway. Laura Dwighton looked like a visitor from another world.

She was dressed in a clinging medieval tea gown of dull-blue brocade. Her auburn hair was parted in the middle and brought down over her ears. Her arms were bare.

One of them was outstretched to steady herself against the frame of the doorway, the other hung down by her side, clasping a book. She looked, Mr. Satterthwaite thought, like a Madonna from an early Italian canvas.

She stood there, swaying slightly from side to side. Colonel Melrose sprang toward her.

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"I've come to tell you—to tell you—"

Her voice was low and rich. Mr. Satterthwaite was so entranced with the dramatic value of the scene that he had forgotten its reality.

"Please, Lady Dwighton—"

Melrose had an arm round her, supporting her. He took her across the hall into a small anteroom, its walls hung with faded silk. Quin and Satterthwaite followed. She sank down on the low settee, her head resting back on a rust-colored cushion, her eyelids closed. The three men watched her.

Suddenly she opened her eyes and sat up. She spoke very quietly. *"I killed him,"* she said. "That's what I came to tell you. *I killed him!"*

There was a moment's agonized silence. Mr. Satterthwaite's heart missed a beat.

"Lady Dwighton," said Melrose. "You've had a great shock—you're unstrung. I don't think you quite know what you're saying."

Would she draw back now—while there was yet time?

"I know perfectly what I'm saying. It was I who shot him."

Two of the men in the room gasped, the other made no sound. Laura Dwighton leaned still farther forward.

"Don't you understand? I came down and shot him. I admit it."

The book she had been holding in her hand clattered to the floor. There was a paper cutter in it, a thing shaped like a dagger with a jeweled hilt. Mr. Satterthwaite picked it up mechanically and placed it on the table. As he did so he thought: That's a dangerous toy; you could kill a man with that.

"Well"—Laura Dwighton's voice was impatient—"what are you going to do about it? Arrest me? Take me away?"

Colonel Melrose found his voice with difficulty.

"What you have told me is very serious, Lady Dwighton. I must ask you to go to your room till I have—er—made arrangements."

She nodded and rose. She was quite composed now, grave and cold.

As she turned toward the door, Mr. Quin spoke. "What did you do with the revolver, Lady Dwighton?"

A flicker of uncertainty passed across her face.

"I—I dropped it there on the floor. No, I think I threw it out of the window—oh! I can't remember now. What does it matter? I hardly knew what I was doing. It doesn't matter, does it?"

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"No," said Mr. Quin. "I hardly think it matters."

She looked at him in perplexity with a shade of something that might have been alarm. Then she flung back her head and went imperiously out of the room. Mr. Satterthwaite hastened after her. She might, he felt, collapse at any minute. But she was already halfway up the staircase, displaying no sign of her earlier weakness.

The scared-looking maid was standing at the foot of the staircase, and Mr. Satterthwaite spoke to her authoritatively, "Look after your mistress," he said.

"Yes, sir." The girl prepared to ascend after the blue-robed figure. "Oh, please, sir, they don't suspect him, do they?"

"Suspect whom?"

"Jennings, sir. Oh! Indeed, sir, he wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Jennings? No, of course not. Go and look after your mistress.

"Yes, sir."

The girl ran quickly up the staircase. Mr. Satterthwaite returned to the room he had just vacated.

Colonel Melrose was saying heavily, "Well, I'm jiggered. There's more in this than meets the eye. It—it's like those dashed silly things heroines do in many novels."

"It's unreal," agreed Mr. Satterthwaite. "It's like something on the stage."

Mr. Quin nodded. "Yes, you admire the drama, do you not? You are a man who appreciates good acting when you see it."

Mr. Satterthwaite looked hard at him.

In the silence that followed a faroff sound came to their ears.

"Sounds like a shot," said Colonel Melrose. "One of the keepers, I daresay. That's probably what she heard. Perhaps she went down to see. She wouldn't go close or examine the body. She'd leap at once to the conclusion—"

"Mr. Delangua, sir."

It was the old butler who spoke, standing apologetically in the doorway.

"Eh?" said Melrose. "What's that?"

"Mr. Delangua is here, sir, and would like to speak to you if he may."

Colonel Melrose leaned back in his chair.

"Show him in," he said grimly.

A moment later Paul Delangua stood in the doorway. As Colonel Melrose had hinted, there was something un-English about

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him—the easy grace of his movements, the dark handsome face, the eyes set a little too close together. There hung about him the air of the Renaissance. He and Laura Dwighton suggested the same atmosphere.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said Delangua. He made a little theatrical bow.

"I don't know what your business may be, Mr. Delangua," said Colonel Melrose sharply, "but if it is nothing to do with the matter at hand—"

Delangua interrupted him with a laugh.

"On the contrary," he said, "it has everything to do with it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Delangua quietly, "that I have come to give myself up for the murder of Sir James Dwighton."

"You know what you are saying?" said Melrose gravely.

"Perfectly."

The young man's eyes were riveted to the table.

"I don't understand—"

"Why I give myself up? Call it remorse—call it anything you please. I stabbed him right enough—you may be quite sure of that." He nodded toward the table. "You've got the weapon there, I see. A very handy little tool. Lady Dwighton unfortunately left it lying around in a book, and I happened to snatch it up."

"One minute," said Colonel Melrose. "Am I to understand that you admit stabbing Sir James with this?"

He held the dagger aloft.

"Quite right. I stole in through the window, you know. He had his back to me. It was quite easy. I left the same way."

"Through the window?"

"Through the window, of course."

"And what time was this?"

Delangua hesitated.

"Let me see—I was talking to the keeper fellow—that was at a quarter past six. I heard the church tower chime. It must have been—well, say somewhere about half-past."

A grim smile came to the colonel's lips.

"Quite right, young man," he said. "Half-past six was the time. Perhaps you've heard that already? But this is altogether a most peculiar murder!"

"Why?"

"So many people confess to it," said Colonel Melrose.

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They heard the sharp intake of the other's breath.

"Who else has confessed to it?" he asked in a voice that he vainly strove to render steady.

"Lady Dwighton."

Delangua threw back his head and laughed in rather a forced manner.

"Lady Dwighton is apt to be hysterical," he said lightly. "I shouldn't pay any attention to what she says if I were you."

"I don't think I shall," said Melrose. "But there's another odd thing about this murder."

"What's that?"

"Well," said Melrose, "Lady Dwighton has confessed to having shot Sir James, and you have confessed to having stabbed him. But luckily for both of you, he wasn't shot or stabbed, you see. His skull was smashed in."

"My God!" cried Delangua. "But a woman couldn't possibly do that—"

He stopped, biting his lip. Melrose nodded with the ghost of a smile.

"Often read of it," he volunteered. "Never seen it happen."

"What?"

"Couple of young idiots each accusing themselves because they thought the other one had done it," said Melrose. "Now we've got to begin at the beginning."

"The valet," cried Mr. Satterthwaite. "That girl just now—I wasn't paying any attention at the time."

He paused, striving for coherence.

"She was afraid of our suspecting him. There must be some motive that he had and which we don't know, but she does."

Colonel Melrose frowned, then he rang the bell. When it was answered, he said, "Please ask Lady Dwighton if she will be good enough to come down again?"

They waited in silence until she came. At sight of Delangua she started and stretched out a hand to save herself from falling. Colonel Melrose came quickly to the rescue.

"It's quite all right, Lady Dwighton. Please don't be alarmed."

"I don't understand. What is Mr. Delangua doing here?"

Delangua came over to her.

"Laura—Laura—why did you do it?"

"Do it?"

"I know. It was for me—because you thought that *I*—after all, it

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was natural, I suppose. But, oh! You angel!"

Colonel Melrose cleared his throat. He was a man who disliked emotion and had a horror of anything approaching a "scene."

"If you'll allow me to say so, Lady Dwighton, both you and Mr. Delangua have had a lucky escape. He had just arrived in his turn to 'confess' to the murder—oh, it's quite all right, he didn't do it! But what we want to know is the truth. No more shillyshallying. The butler says you went into the library at half-past six—is that so?"

Laura looked at Delangua. He nodded. "The truth, Laura," he said. "That is what we want now."

She breathed a deep sigh.

"I will tell you."

She sank down on a chair that Mr. Satterthwaite had hurriedly pushed forward.

"I did come down. I opened the library door and I saw—"

She stopped and swallowed. Mr. Satterthwaite patted her hand encouragingly.

"Yes," he said. "Yes. You saw?"

"My husband was lying across the writing table. I saw his head—the blood—oh!"

She put her hands to her face. The chief constable leaned forward.

"Excuse me, Lady Dwighton. You thought Mr. Delangua had shot him?"

She nodded.

"Forgive me, Paul," she pleaded. "But you said—you said—"

"That I'd shoot him like a dog," said Delangua grimly. "I remember. That was the day I discovered he'd been ill-treating you."

The chief constable kept sternly to the matter in hand.

"Then I am to understand, Lady Dwighton, that you went upstairs again and—er—said nothing. We needn't go into your reason. You didn't touch the body or go near the writing table?"

She shuddered. "No, no. I ran straight out of the room."

"I see. And what time was this exactly? Do you know?"

"It was just half-past six when I got back to my bedroom."

"Then at—say, twenty-five past six Sir James was already dead." The chief constable looked at the others. "That clock—it was faked, eh? We suspected that all along. Nothing easier than to move the hands to whatever time you wished, but they made a

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mistake to lay it down on its side like that.

"Well, that seems to narrow it down to the butler or the valet, and I can't believe it's the butler. Tell me, Lady Dwighton, did this man Jennings have any grudge against your husband?"

Laura lifted her face from her hands.

"Not exactly a grudge, but—well, James told me only this morning that he'd dismissed him. He'd found him pilfering."

"Ah! Now we're getting at it. Jennings would have been dismissed without a character reference. A serious matter for him."

"You said something about a clock," said Laura Dwighton. "There's just a chance—if you want to fix the time—James would have been sure to have his little golf watch on him. Mightn't that have been smashed too when he fell forward?"

"It's an idea," said the colonel slowly. "But I'm afraid—Curtis!"

The Inspector nodded in quick comprehension and left the room. He returned a minute later. On the palm of his hand was a silver watch marked like a golf ball, the kind that are sold for golfers to carry loose in a pocket with balls.

"Here it is, sir," he said, "but I doubt if it will be any good. They're tough, these watches."

The colonel took it from him and held it to his ear.

"It seems to have stopped," he observed.

He pressed with his thumb and the lid of the watch flew open. Inside the glass was cracked across.

"Ah!" he said exultantly.

The hand pointed to exactly a quarter past six.

"A very good glass of port, Colonel Melrose," said Mr. Quin.

It was half-past nine, and the three men had just finished a belated dinner at Colonel Melrose's house. Mr. Satterthwaite was particularly jubilant.

"I was quite right," he chuckled. "You can't deny it, Mr. Quin. You turned up tonight to save two absurd young people who were both bent on putting their heads into a noose."

"Did I?" said Mr. Quin. "Surely not. I did nothing at all."

"As it turned out, it was not necessary," agreed Mr. Satterthwaite. "But it might have been. It was touch and go, you know. I shall never forget the moment when Lady Dwighton said 'I killed him.' I've never seen anything on the stage half as dramatic."

"I am inclined to agree with you," said Mr. Quin.

"Wouldn't have believed such a thing could happen outside a

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novel," declared the colonel, for perhaps the twentieth time.

"Does it?" asked Mr. Quin.

The colonel stared at him.

"Damn it, it happened tonight."

"Mind you," interposed Mr. Satterthwaite, leaning back and sipping his port. "Lady Dwighton was magnificent, quite magnificent, but she made one mistake. She shouldn't have leaped to the conclusion that her husband had been shot. In the same way Delangua was a fool to assume that he had been stabbed just because the dagger happened to be lying on the table in front of us. It was a mere coincidence that Lady Dwighton should have brought it down with her."

"Was it?" asked Mr. Quin.

"Now if they'd only confined themselves to saying that they'd killed Sir James, without particularizing how," went on Mr. Satterthwaite, "what would have been the result?"

"They might have been believed," said Mr. Quin with an odd smile.

"The whole thing was exactly like a novel," said the colonel.

"That's where they got the idea from, I daresay," said Mr. Quin.

"Possibly," agreed Mr. Satterthwaite. "Things one has read do come back to one in the oddest way."

He looked across at Mr. Quin.

"Of course," he said. "The clock really looked suspicious from the first. One ought never to forget how easy it is to put the hands of a clock or watch forward or back."

Mr. Quin nodded and repeated the words.

"Forward," he said, and paused. *"Or back."*

There was something encouraging in his voice. His bright dark eyes were fixed on Mr. Satterthwaite.

"The hands of the clock were put forward," said Mr. Satterthwaite. "We know that."

"Were they?" asked Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite stared at him.

"Do you mean," he said slowly, "that it was the watch which was put back? But that doesn't make sense. It's impossible."

"Not *impossible*," murmured Mr. Quin.

"Well—absurd. To whose advantage could that be?"

"Only, I suppose, to someone who had an alibi for that time."

"By gad!" cried the colonel. "That's the time young Delangua said he was talking to the keeper."

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"He told us that very particularly," said Mr. Satterthwaite.

They looked at each other. They had an uneasy feeling as of solid ground failing beneath their feet. Facts went spinning round, turning new and unexpected faces. And in the center of the kaleidoscope was the dark smiling face of Mr. Quin.

"But in that case," began Melrose, "in that case—"

Mr. Satterthwaite, nimble-witted, finished his sentence for him.

"It's all the other way round. A plant just the same—but a plant against the valet. Oh, but it can't be! It's impossible. Why, both of them accused themselves of the crime."

"Yes," said Mr. Quin. "Up till then you suspected them, didn't you?"

His voice went on, placid and dreamy. "Just like something out of a book, you said, Colonel. They got the idea there. It's what the innocent hero and heroine do. Of course it made you think *them* innocent—there was the force of tradition behind them. Mr. Satterthwaite has been saying all along it was like something on the stage. You were both right. *It wasn't real*. You've been saying so without knowing what you were saying. They'd have told a much better story than that if they'd *wanted* to be believed."

The two men looked at him helplessly.

"It would be clever," said Mr. Satterthwaite slowly. "It would be diabolically clever. And I've thought of something else. The butler said he went in at seven to shut the windows—so he must have expected them to be open."

"That's the way Delangua came in," said Mr. Quin. "He killed Sir James with one blow, and he and she together did what they had to do—"

He looked at Mr. Satterthwaite, encouraging him to reconstruct the scene. He did so, hesitatingly.

"They smashed the clock and put it on its side. Yes. They altered the watch and smashed it. Then he went out of the window and she fastened it after him. But there's one thing I don't see. Why bother with the watch at all? Why not simply put back the hands of the clock?"

"The clock was always a little obvious," said Mr. Quin. "Anyone might have seen through a transparent device like that."

"But surely the watch was too far-fetched. Why, it was pure chance that we ever thought of the watch."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Quin. "It was the lady's suggestion, remember."

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Mr. Satterthwaite stared at him fascinated.

"And yet, you know," said Mr. Quin dreamily, "the one person who wouldn't be likely to overlook the watch would be the valet. Valets know better than anyone what their masters carry in their pockets. If he changed the time on the clock, the valet would have changed the watch too. They don't understand human nature, those two. They are not like Mr. Satterthwaite."

Mr. Satterthwaite shook his head.

"I was all wrong," he murmured humbly. "I thought that you had come to save them."

"So I did," said Mr. Quin. "Oh! Not those two—the others. Perhaps you didn't notice the lady's maid? She wasn't wearing blue brocade, or acting a dramatic part. But she's really a very pretty girl, and I think she loves that man Jennings very much. I think that between you you'll be able to save her man from getting hanged."

"We've no proof of any kind," said Colonel Melrose heavily.

Mr. Quin smiled.

"Mr. Satterthwaite has."

"I?"

Mr. Satterthwaite was astonished.

Mr. Quin went on. "You have a proof that watch wasn't smashed in Sir James's pocket. You can't smash a watch like that without opening the case. Just try it and see. Someone took the watch out and opened it, set back the hands, smashed the glass, and then shut it and put it back. *They never noticed that a fragment of glass was missing.*"

"Oh!" cried Mr. Satterthwaite. His hand flew to his waistcoat pocket. He drew out a fragment of curved glass.

It was his moment.

"With this," said Mr. Satterthwaite importantly, "I shall save a man from the gallows."

"Q"

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"Most people have murderous fantasies of one sort or the other" . . .

PROBLEMS SOLVED

by BILL PRONZINI & BARRY N. MALZBERG

Dear Mr. Grey:

Thank you for consulting me, and for your expression of confidence that I will be able to solve your problem. I do take considerable pride in "Problems Solved," my consultation service. As you know from my magazine advertisements, this service by mail has been functioning successfully for seven years (with never a complaint, if I may add proudly).

Now then, to your problem. Mr. Grey, the question you pose in your last paragraph is obviously what has really been on your mind throughout your letter. Thus, in answer to this question, let me say that I do not believe your murderous fantasies are so unusual, nor do I think that you have any reason to feel as guilty about them as you say. *Most* people have murderous fantasies of one sort or the other, sometimes toward those who are closest to them and whom they love best. These fantasies function usually as a normal and healthy outlet, since the important thing is that they will never be acted upon. Seen in that context, then, they are definitely a healthy release.

Of course, guilt can be self-destructive. I am reminded of a case many years ago in the small upstate New York town in which my wife was born: a local man murdered several strangers for the confessed reason that he had "wanted to kill people all the time lately and I couldn't stand knowing I was as good as a murderer inside, so I just went out and did it." So, Mr. Grey, I urge you to work on these guilt feelings of yours more than on the fantasies themselves. It is *only* the guilt building up within you which could be dangerous.

Your accompanying check in the amount of $50.00 is exactly double my customary fee for a consultation of this nature. Therefore, I am entering a credit of $25.00 which you may use for another consultation. I *do* hope to hear from you again, since I be-

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lieve your particular problem may involve at least one and possibly two or three additional consultations before we can safely mark it "solved."

Sincerely yours,
Dr. Harold Rawls
"Problems Solved"

Dear Mr. Grey:

I am in receipt of your second letter, and I must say first of all that I am sorry you were disappointed with my initial advice. I am also sorry that you feel continually disturbed, and although I agree that there is no accounting for "the range of human pain and the desire to inflict pain," as you put it, I must strongly repeat what I said previously.

Giving free rein to your murderous fantasies may actually be counter-productive, you know. The explicitness of detail in your letter would be shocking to a nonprofessional, and while I well understand the context in which this should be placed, I must tell you that I would not, if I were you, express these details to anyone but me.

Please, Mr. Grey, you must understand that your fantasies are quite common and that you should not feel the kind of guilt which merely triggers further rage and pain. We live in difficult times, unhappy times: many of your best friends, perhaps, would secretly like to be murderers. It is the act of *commission* which makes all the difference.

This second consultation has been paid for, of course, by your $25.00 credit. When you write again, please enclose further remuneration. And please tell me something about yourself as well. You have been quite bare on personal details in your two letters to date. With more knowledge of who you are, what you do for a living, and so on, I can be much more specific in my advice.

Sincerely yours,
Dr. Harold Rawls
"Problems Solved"

Dear Mr. Grey:

I have received your latest letter and your $100.00 check for a total of four consultations. However, I am returning herewith my check in the amount of $75.00, which represents a total refund less $25.00 for this third, and unfortunately final, consultation.

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You have given me no alternative, Mr. Grey. I cannot deal with you any longer. You have refused to confide any personal information beyond a name and a post office box address in upper Manhattan. You prefer to remain hidden in the shadows, as it were. As a result I have no idea of who you are or who you are talking about when you mention "this urge, this terrible, incessant urge to kill." Members of your family? Friends? Business associates? Strangers? I have no way of knowing.

You seem also and for no apparent reason to have taken a dangerously abusive attitude toward me, which I will not tolerate. Violent emotional outbursts and veiled threats such as those which marked your letter are pointless, childish, and misdirected.

It is my final opinion, Mr. Grey, that you are a seriously ill personality and that you should immediately seek a face-to-face consultation with a qualified psychotherapist. Do so, I urge you, before it is too late.

Sincerely,
Dr. Harold Rawls
"Problems Solved"

Mr. Grey:

I suppose I should have foreseen the content of your most recent letter. That I did not is a comment only upon my heavy workload. I will say nothing about your vile and insane threat on my life. I will not attempt to reason with you, for it is obvious you have graduated byond reason to psychosis.

I would like you to know, however, that I maintain careful files which include all letters sent to me and carbons of all my responses. These files are kept under lock and key, where no one but myself and my secretary have access to them, and in the event of harm to me they would immediately be turned over to the police.

Not, of course, that I anticipate any harm from you. Individuals such as yourself are very common in my profession. You obtain satisfaction from ventilating aggressions which you are unable to act out in reality. Thus, I am not at all frightened that you will carry out your threat. Threats such as yours do not disconcert me in the slightest, for I not only understand their origin, I have a great inner strength.

I suggest, once again, that you consult a qualified psychotherapist as soon as possible.

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Sincerely,
Dr. Harold Rawls
"Problems Solved"

Dear Friends,

I'm sorry for this mimeographed note, but I don't have the time or the energy to personally thank all of you who sent flowers and other expressions of sympathy on the terrible death of my husband, Dr. Harold Rawls. I know you will understand. I also know you will understand why I must go away for a while. There are too many memories here, too much sorrow—and as long as the lunatic who murdered Harold is still at large, my own life may be in danger as well.

With gratitude,
Muriel Rawls

MR JOE VINSON CRISTOBAL HOTEL NASSAU GRAND BAHAMAS ARRIVING EIGHT FORTY TONIGHT FLIGHT 62 STOP PROBLEM SOLVED STOP LOVE YOU

MURIEL

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INTRODUCTION

This story, from the yellowing pages of a late-twenties' pulp magazine, was written by Desmond Satchel, a minor writer who nonetheless wrote with a certain raw power. Readers will note the influence of Carroll John Daly, Frederick Nebel, Erle Stanley Gardner, and possibly even of Dashiell Hammett.

It is interesting to recall that pulp writers were paid by the word. When hard pressed for cash, a writer may occasionally have been tempted to pad his word count. But writers like Desmond Satchel wrote lean hard prose, with not a word wasted.

$106,000 MUD BUNNY

An Adventure of the Transcendental Cop

by DESMOND SATCHEL

with an introduction

by JON L. BREEN

The little group in Gory Joe's on Powell convinced me. Something big was brewing. No sleuth with eyes could miss it.

Around the table sat a transcontinental convocation of crooks, and I didn't think they'd all decided on San Francisco for a vacation. At the head of the table was Red Dust, a genial chiseler who was a dead ringer for the Kaiser. By his side was Sad-Eyed Melba, who packed more danger in her five-foot, one-hundred-pound frame than a basketful of cobras. Their usual stamping ground was Detroit, and their table companions included Eddie the Torch from Chicago, Rugs Richmond and Glad-Hand Garrity from Boston, Pinkie Paul and Edge Steinwold from Cleveland, and a big delegation from Philadelphia—Elmo Fingers, Elsie Cowl, the Screwdriver Kid, Gunner Sells, and Gooseberry Lane.

I edged my way to the pay phone, trying to keep my bulky frame in the shadows. I dialed headquarters of the Transcendental Detective Agency and asked for the Old Man.

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"Yeah?" he coughed.

"This is going to be big. Real big. Every crook in America seems to be in town. Glad-Hand Garrity, Eddie the Torch, Pinkie Paul, Red Dust, the Screwdriver Kid, Gunner Sells—"

"All after the mud bunny?"

"Naw, it's worth $106,000, but I don't see all these hoods showing up to steal one clay statue. How would they split the take? No, it's bigger than that."

"Our concern at the moment is the mud bunny. Is it safe?"

"Yeah, sure, right in my coat pocket. But look, that's just the lineup at Gory Joe's. I saw Axman Cassidy at Oakland Annie's place having a steak with Sausage Sam Smith, Willie the Wasp, Hospital Hawkins, Peter Collinson, and Berkeley Butch. Their molls were with them too—Marin Maggie, Typhoon Mary, Roxy the Rockette."

"Just hang onto the mud bunny. It may just be a clay rabbit to you, but it's a member of the family to its owner and a meal ticket to the Transcendental. If those jaspers are spoiling for a shootout, the Transcendental's got other ops without a $106,000 worth of business in their pockets. And the last I heard, San Francisco still has a police force. Get me?"

"Yeah," I said and hung up. I got out of there and down Powell to Geary, up Geary to Ev Millweedy's speak, and the story was the same. Louis the Louse sampling the local hospitality of Sausalito Slim, Palo Alto Pete, and Mendocino Minnie. They weren't alone. There was Gordy the Gat, in from New York, and Two-Fingered Claude, Denver Doris, Harry the Hoop, and the Alcatraz Kid.

Out of there and up Geary to Polk I sped, almost at a run though I didn't know why, the $106,000 mud bunny in my pocket bouncing heavily and slowing me down. As I slipped into Billy Grabber's place, I looked around me and saw more of the same. There was Con Crete of Cicero, Illinois, and his pal Machine-Gun Morrissy. South Bend Sid was there, with his regular gal Greta Noter—I knew it spelled trouble whenever the Noter dame turned up, because her eyes would turn a guy to melted butter, even certain ops of the Transcendental, though guys who can see through eyes can see through Greta. The host this time was Stockton Stanley, and Ollie the Necktie was there, with Rubout Richie and Ballast Bob.

Coming out of Billy Grabber's, I saw an operative named

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George Grover coming up Polk. I nudged him and motioned him into the alley.

"Still got the mud bunny?" he asked me.

"Yeah, sure," I said, patting my pocket.

"Good. I been to Madame Glory's place. New talent there, in from the east coast. Montana Pearl and Pekin Annie. Alice Cream and Madcap Nora in from Chi. What's it mean?"

"Something big. Real big. Red Dust's in town."

"Red Dust?"

"Yeah. And Edge Steinwold, the Screwdriver Kid, Glad-Hand Garrity, Rugs Richmond, Axman Cassidy, Gordy the Gat, Two-Fingered Claude, Ollie the Necktie, Sad-Eyed Melba, Harry the Hoop, Gooseberry Lane, Gunner Sells, Pinkie Paul, Axman Cassidy—"

"You said him already."

"Typhoon Mary, Con Crete, Ballast Bob, Machine-Gun Morrissy."

"This *is* big. Watch the mud bunny. The millionaire owner's paying the Transcendental some big change to guard it."

"I know, I know. But this is bigger than the mud bunny. The mud bunny's small change to these hoods. More likely they plan to knock over every bank in San Francisco at high noon tomorrow, and a lot of those banks are Transcendental customers."

"You ain't the only Transcendental op. Be wise. Lay low. I can handle this."

George took one step into Billy Grabber's. A loud noise of fire came fast and he reeled out backward, full of holes. The war was on.

I stormed in, rod drawn and ready. They looked surprised, and for a second it was like a still picture. Red Dust and Axman Cassidy had joined Ollie the Necktie and Ballast Bob for a powwow, and the real bigshot of the bay had joined in—Alameda Elmer. This was where the big play would be made.

Guns blazed and the smoke rose like a fog on the bay. With one shot I took out Con Crete. I got Ollie in his now red necktie, and the same shot went right through him to get Axman Cassidy. Rubout Richie and Stockton Stanley fell together like bookends, and shortly Ballast Bob and Alameda Elmer breathed their last. Greta Noter put those lamps on me and my gun hand almost wavered, but I put a bullet right between them a second later.

The rest scattered, all the big boys dead save one. I had some

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lead in me, but it was all embedded safely in fat.

I staggered out onto Polk for a breath of air untainted by gunpowder. Then I saw Red Dust running up the street. My rod was fresh out of fishhooks. I reached in my coat and pulled out the mud bunny. I aimed it right at Red's fleeing head and soon made it redder with a throw Walter Johnson would have been proud of. The mud bunny was in a million pieces, but by me it was worth it.

Next day the Transcendental gave me my walking papers. A few weeks later they were out of business, the millionaire owner of the mud bunny having put out the word. Now the hoods can run wild, so I guess the mud bunny was what the crooks were gunning for after all.

A lot of sleuths are out of work these days. I may take up writing.

DETECTIVERSE

TV OR NOT TV

by JOHN D. MORSE

Because millions hasten
To view Perry Mason
Most individuals
Crave his residuals.

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a *NEW* crime story by
ROBERT L. FISH

A former cellmate at Soledad drops in unexpectedly on Angie Testa . . . one of Robert L. Fish's "darker" stories . . .

THE PATSY

by ROBERT L. FISH

Testa paused in his labors, frowning uncertainly, and stared upward toward the head of the stairs. Somebody was leaning on the front doorbell, not just ringing, but leaning on it viciously. He wiped sweat from his forehead with a corded arm and waited anxiously, hoping the person would either go away or drop dead; but when the shrill penetrating dentist-drill-like racket gave no sign of ceasing, he leaned his shovel against the cellar wall and climbed the steps, going to open the front door.

His face froze. Behind the haze of the screen door he saw Cleary standing there. Cleary looked at Testa through the woven wire sardonically.

"You want to pretend you ain't home, Angie, don't leave your screen door locked on the inside."

Testa glanced down involuntarily at the latch beneath the handle, then brought his eyes back to the tough face smiling at his a bit derisively from the other side of the screen. He wet his lips nervously.

"What're you doing here? What d'you want?"

"Now, really," Cleary said reprovingly. "That ain't what I call a very hospitable greeting. That ain't the way to talk to an old roommate."

"How'd you know where to find me?"

"Angie," Cleary said, twisting the screen-door knob, "we stand around here all day, some nosey neighbor of yours is gonna wonder why. So unlock this thing, will you? Or do I put my foot through it and unlock it myself?"

Testa hesitated a moment, then slid the latch up. Cleary pushed

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into the house, shouldering the larger Testa aside; then he closed the door behind him, twisting the latch to lock it. For a moment Testa considered resistance, but then he stepped back reluctantly. Cleary grinned. The Testas of the world always stood back at the last moment. Reluctantly, maybe, but they always stood back, it was what made the world livable for the Clearys. Testa bit his lip, as if reading the other man's mind.

"How'd you find me?"

"This will slay you," Cleary said, his grin widening. "I looked you up in the phone book. Simple? Only Angelo Testa in town. That's the trouble with getting respectable, Angie. You get in the phone book."

Testa stared at the familiar hated face. "What do you want from me?"

Cleary paid no attention to the question, looking the place over.

"Not bad," he said critically. "It ain't the Ritz, but it beats Soledad." He swung around. "Hey! I heard you got married." Testa remained silent, staring at him. Cleary looked over his shoulder. "Not home? The little woman?"

"I asked you before," Testa said quietly, desperately. "What do you want?"

"Yeah, you did ask me, didn't you? I remember hearing you." Cleary spotted an easy chair that seemed to suit him and walked over to drop into it. He ran his hands sensuously over the soft upholstery fabric and looked up, smiling coolly. "What do I want? Well, I'll start with a beer."

For a moment the sheer gall of the man overcame Testa's natural irresolution. "This ain't no bar, Cleary. State your business and get on your way."

Cleary stared a moment, then burst into laughter.

"Man, Angie, what have you been reading lately? Superman? 'State your business and get on your way'!" Cleary's laughter disappeared as quickly as it had come. His face hardened. "Let's get one thing straightened out, Testa. I need a place to hole up, and this is it. You been elected, get used to it." He waited a moment, prepared to deal with any insurrection; when it failed to materialize he relaxed a bit. "It won't be long, Angie. A week, maybe."

Testa's hesitation had only been the result of his utter panic at the thought of Cleary staying in the house. "It's impossible," he said at last, his throat dry. "Absolutely impossible."

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"Didn't they teach you at school that nothing's impossible?" Cleary said airily, and dismissed the subject. He looked at the photograph on the end table beside his chair, then reached out and picked it up. "Hey, the wife." He studied the picture a moment with a faint frown. "Ain't this the dame you had her picture down at Soledad?"

"Look, Cleary—"

"The one who thought you was in the Army instead of the jug?" Cleary snorted. "Man, how'd you ever get away with a scam like that? She really that dumb?"

"Guy I used to know in Nam used to forward our letters," Testa said, and then realized he had been trapped into social conversation. "Look, Cleary, you can't stay here—"

"Yeah," Cleary said, still studying the photograph. "That's her, all right. Jaw like a lion tamer." He glanced up at Testa, taking in the dirty clothes, the sweaty face, the nervousness. He shook his head with poorly concealed disdain. "Got you slaving away even on your Saturday off, huh? While she's probably down at some beauty parlor getting her face lifted. Not that she couldn't use it if she looks like that picture." He put the photograph back on the table, grinning. "Just kidding, Angie. After all, we're going to be a happy family for a week or so, no? Any kids?"

"Please, Cleary—"

The grin disappeared. "I asked you if you had any kids," Cleary said dangerously. "I don't ask questions just to hear myself talk. I want to know if you got any big-mouthed brats might go blabbing around."

"I don't have no kids. You ought to know that."

"She could of had some. What do you do for a living?"

"Look, Cleary—"

"That's again I asked you a question," Cleary said admonishingly.

"I got a job helping a guy plumbing, like they learned me down at Soledad," Testa said helplessly. "What difference? Look, Cleary—"

"—'you can't stay here, Cleary.' I know. You're really beginning to bug me with that busted record routine." Cleary shook his head pityingly. "So you're helping a guy plumbing like they learned you in prison. If you had any brains, or any guts, you'd of learned something a little more profitable down there. But not you. Not Angelo Testa."

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"Cleary, please—!"

"Some people," Cleary said, burrowing deeper into the comfortable chair as he explored the philosophical concept that had come to him and which now intrigued him, "are born to be patsies. You're one of them, Angie, no offense meant. You can't help it any more than a guy can help being left-handed."

Testa swallowed. Time was running out. "Cleary, look. I never gave you no grief down at Soledad, did I? So why don't you leave me alone? Why don't you beat it? I'm asking you, as a favor—"

"Because I'm staying, that's why," Cleary said flatly, and went on with his theme as if he had not been interrupted. "Like your getting married, for example. That's what I mean being a born patsy. Jaw like a warden, eye like a wall beacon. Maybe that's what you want, Angie. A warden. You been inside so much—"

"Cleary," Testa said desperately, "you got to blow! Now! You can't stay—"

"Or maybe she just come up to you and said, 'Angelo'—ten to one she calls you Angelo, not Angie—'Angelo, we're getting married tomorrow.' And you probably just stared at the ground and says, 'Yes, dear. What time?' "

"Now, look, Cleary! You—"

"And *twenty* to one," Cleary went on relentlessly, "since then she's been giving you that 'Angelo! Cut the grass! Angelo! Fix the roof! Angelo, there's a dime missing from your pay envelope—what did you do, stop for a beer again?" The statement was father to a more important thought. "Speaking of which," Cleary added, "what happened to that beer I wanted?"

"We—" Testa swallowed. "We ain't got no beer," he said quickly, cunningly. "I'll go down the corner and pick up a six-pack."

Cleary shook his head half humorously.

"Angie, Angie! I forgot to tell you, patsies shouldn't try to get cute because they ain't got the brains for it. You ain't leaving this house until your wife gets here, and then only one of you goes out, and that one is going to be *you*. And you'll come back without going to the cops—"

"*Cops*?" Testa said, startled.

"—or you'll come back to find your wife even uglier than she is now," Cleary said harshly. "And if you give me any trouble while I'm enjoying your hospitality for the next week or so, then, Angelo my friend, I blow the whistle on *you*!"

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"You can't blow no whistle on me," Testa said defensively. "I done my time—"

"I thought for a minute there you was going to say you paid your debt to society," Cleary said, his eyes twinkling again, his anger forgotten. He was enjoying himself.

"I done my time," Testa repeated forcefully. "My boss knows I done time—I had to tell him. My wife—" He stopped dead.

"Yeah," Cleary said significantly. "Your wife. Old granite-jaw. Does *she* know you done time?"

Testa stared, his palms damp. He wiped them tightly against the rough cloth of his worn work pants. "I—"

"Yeah," Cleary said, and laughed. "Man, I can hear her now! Angelo, you miserable *convict*! Angelo, you lied! Angelo, you—you *nasty man*!"

Testa shook his head miserably. "Please, Cleary," he said with piteous entreaty. "Why don't you beat it and leave me alone?"

"Because I like it here," Cleary said calmly. "And I'm getting tired of talking, so how about that beer?" He saw the rigid look on Testa's face and came to his feet. "Okay, if you insist, I'll get the beer myself. I never heard of no plumber's helper yet who didn't have a brew or two on ice."

"*Cleary*—!"

But Cleary was already in the kitchen, opening the refrigerator.

"No beer, huh?" he said expressionlessly, and withdrew a can. "You want one?" Testa continued to look at him with agonized eyes. Cleary shrugged. "Okay, but you sure look like you could use one." He closed the refrigerator door, ripped the tab from the top of the can, and upended it. Over the rim of the can his eye caught the open cellar door. He drank deeply and lowered the can. "Working down the cellar?"

Testa was almost crying. "Cleary, please! You got your beer, how about beating it?"

"What are you working on down there?"

"Why don't you leave me alone? *Why don't you leave me alone?*"

"Like to look over any joint I hole up in," Cleary said expansively. "Like to check on all the ins and outs." He was in a good mood as he started down the steps. "Also like to see what my old pal Angie does in his spare time when his wife ain't scaring him to death—"

He reached the bottom of the stairs, took three steps, and stopped, rigid, staring down, his eyes opening wide. The hole in

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the floor was not large, but to Cleary's eye it had an unmistakable shape. The hole had been partially filled and tamped, hiding whatever lay beneath, but there was still a large pile of loose earth to one side. An unshaded bulb overhead cast a looming shadow of the pile against the damp wall. Cleary drew a tremulous breath.

"No wonder you was so nervous!" He said half admiringly. "No wonder you was so anxious to get me out of the house! So you finally got tired of being a patsy, huh? Well, at least I don't expect no more trouble from you about me staying here."

He turned his head, his grin returning. Testa's face was tortured; his muscles bunched.

"I begged you to beat it," he said half under his breath, sobbing, and then swung the heavy shovel with all his tremendous strength.

Testa tamped the rest of the earth down and looked at the revised hole in the floor. It was, necessarily, larger than originally planned, and he only hoped he had enough cement for the floor patch. The excess of earth would have to be carted outside and distributed in the garden, but that would be later, probably at night.

He reached for the first bag of cement, his mind so occupied that for a while he didn't even hear the ringing of the bell. Then it came, almost as if Cleary was back upstairs, leaning on the bell, although that was impossible. Then he remembered. He put down the cement bag and climbed the stairs to open the front door.

Behind the haze of the screen a wrathful face was glaring at him.

"And just what was the bright idea of locking the door? I'm supposed to come home with my arms full of groceries to cook your meals for you, and then have to dig into my purse to find my house keys just because you're too thoughtless, or too inconsiderate, or just too dumb to leave the door unlocked. You and locking up all the time—!"

The nagging voice followed him into the house, into the kitchen.

"And tracking dirt all over the house as if I didn't have enough to do without following you around cleaning up after you all the time! And aren't you through with that little job in the basement,

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yet? My God, what have you been doing with yourself all morning? Let me see—"

The voice continued down the cellar steps.

"My God! Angelo! Look at the size of that hole! Just to fix a leaky sewer joint! And you supposed to be a plumber! I knew we should have called in someone competent in the first place, but you said, no, you could fix it! Now look at it—half the basement floor! I should have known better, I should have known."

Angelo Testa went back to his task of repairing the basement floor, deafening himself by habit from the harping voice. He tried to imagine what she would have said if she had come home and found Cleary there, Cleary of all people, with his mouth as big as hers, telling her all about Soledad.

The thought made him sick to his stomach.

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a *NEW* Mr. Strang story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

The classroom duties of Mr. Leonard Strang, the gnome-like science teacher of Aldershot High School, have not changed too much over the years—different students, updated lessons, but basically the same routine one semester after another. On the other hand, the extracurricular duties of Mr. Strang have changed considerably. The problem he faces in this newest story is one that would have been unheard-of, utterly incredible, when Mr. Strang was a young teacher. But today the danger threatens suburban school districts at least a few times a year, and even more often the school districts of the inner cities. Today's academic problems can be more explosive than theorems and formulas . . .

MR. STRANG BATTLES A DEADLINE

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

It was only 8:30 in the morning, but already Marvin W. Guthrey, principal of Aldershot High School, knew it was going to be one of those days. Dolefully he leaned forward in his swivel chair and considered the appointment calendar on his desk. Overdue teacher observations to complete, a meeting of the math curriculum committee, a complaint from the art department about the lack of supplies, several irate parents to be placated—

Chung, chung, chung, chung, chung! The minute hand of the clock on the office wall lurched ahead five minutes in less than that many seconds. It now read 4:18. With a groan of annoyance Guthrey pressed the intercom button.

Miss Baird, his secretary, opened the door from the outer office. "Yes, Mr. Guthrey?"

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"Joan, you'll have to work the passing bells by hand again today. When's that repairman coming to fix the master clock?"

"He's out here right now. Almost finished, he says. Would you like to talk to him?"

"No, just tell him to do it right for once. Sheer idiocy, every clock in the building showing a different time."

"Yes, sir. By the way, there are three book salesmen out here, and they all insist—"

"Tell them to come back next week—or next year." Guthrey's patience was stretched to the limit. "And get me some coffee like a good girl, huh?"

Joan Baird made a grim face. An ardent women's lib advocate, she was angry at the idea of being thought of as a "girl" who should fetch coffee on demand. Guthrey knew this, but today he didn't give a damn. When he suffered, everybody else had to suffer.

He picked up the top envelope from the morning's mail on his desk. Slitting it open, he drew out a typewritten note.

He read the note. Then, in disbelief, he read it a second time. The minor problems of the day vanished from his mind like snow before a fiery blast. Laying the note on the desk as if it were a poisonous serpent, he punched the outside-line button on his telephone. He could feel the sweat starting along his spine, and a nervous tic jerked at the corner of one eye.

"Aldershot police! Hurry!"

The desk sergeant identified himself in a bored voice. But when Guthrey had finished speaking he was no longer bored. The call was transferred, and in seconds Chief Corey Heksher was on the line.

The conversation lasted less than half a minute. Hanging up the phone, Guthrey got up and strode through the door to the outer office. Without a word he gripped the handle of a small red box on the wall.

He pulled, and there was a crunching of broken glass, followed immediately by a loud clanging.

In his homeroom on the third floor Mr. Strang had just finished marking a diagonal slash across the date box of one of the attendance cards when the fire alarm began to bong. He peered out through black-rimmed glasses at the 28 seniors who stared back at him expectantly.

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"Well, let's get on with it," he said in a gruff voice. "Two lines down the stairs, and walk, don't run. My sciatica's acting up, and I don't want to be trampled."

By the time Mr. Strang's class had reached the ground floor, the athletic field at the rear of the building was nearly half full of students. It was a constant source of wonder to the old teacher that more than 2000 students, all bent on being "independent" and "doing their own thing" could leave the building in an orderly fashion in less than three minutes. Along the ball field's third-base line he formed his group into something resembling a line and motioned them to sit down.

The last of the students had just cleared the building when the fire sirens were heard, accompanied by a loud cheering from the teenagers. Something was up, thought the old teacher. During practise drills the alarm to the Fire Department was cut off. Probably a false alarm—the smoke detectors were particularly sensitive to squirt guns.

The fire trucks careened into the parking lot. The firemen climbed down onto the pavement but, to Mr. Strang's astonishment, they made no attempt to enter the building or even unpack any equipment. Instead they seemed to be waiting for something.

It wasn't long in coming. Another siren, shriller this time, and a police car pulled up alongside the waiting trucks. The car's rear door opened, and a man resplendent in a blue uniform with glittering gold braid got out.

Mr. Strang recognized Chief of Police Heksher. His daughter Susan was in Mr. Strang's sophomore biology class. Heksher, the fire chief, and Mr. Guthrey all seemed to have their heads together about something.

Half an hour passed. Finally a fireman with a bullhorn walked to the athletic field, his black rubber coat flapping against booted legs.

"We're sending everybody home," he announced in an electrically amplified voice. "The buses have been called, and they're parked over on the next block."

"Man, wouldn't that frost you?" growled someone. "First time something good happens around this dumb place and we're all sent home so's we can't see it."

The fireman ignored the comment. "You're to go off the school grounds through the rear exits," he went on. "Do not, under any circumstances, return inside the building or even pass it to get to

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the front. Please leave the school grounds through the rear gates immediately."

A few students walked off reluctantly. But in spite of the fireman's urging the rest remained where they were. If something was going to happen they wanted to be in on the action.

Finally the fireman made a beckoning motion, and the crew of one of the trucks began unloading lengths of hose and fastening them together.

"Hey, they're gonna spray us!"

"Oh, damn! I ain't gonna get my threads soaked just to watch a bunch of dumb firemen. Let's go."

Slowly, like the beginning of an avalanche, small groups and then the entire mass of students headed toward the rear gates. Within fifteen minutes the athletic field was empty with the exception of the few faculty members. Five minutes later most of the student body were across the street from the high school, but by that time Chief Heksher had his police lines organized, and had isolated the building.

"You teachers can take off," said the fireman. "If you've got cars in the parking lot, leave 'em. You can pick 'em up tomorrow."

"Want to tell us what this is all about?" asked football coach Hank Foley.

"Look, fella, I'm just following—" The fireman paused as a police officer trotted up behind him. There was a whispered conversation, then the fireman turned again to the group of teachers.

"Is one of you named Strang?" asked the fireman. Mr. Strang raised his hand.

"Guthrey's asked to see you. Go along with the officer. The rest of you clear out, huh?"

Stiffly Mr. Strang followed the uniformed man to a spot by one of the trucks, where Mr. Guthrey and Chief Heksher were whispering intently.

"This is the teacher I was telling you about," began Guthrey as Mr. Strang reached them.

"Yeah. Hiya, Leonard," said Heksher.

"Good morning, Cory," replied the teacher. "What's all the excitement?"

Guthrey and Heksher exchanged glances. Finally the police chief shrugged. "Might as well tell him, Marvin. He's got to know sooner or later."

"Know? Know what?"

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"Leonard, someone's hidden a bomb inside the building."

"In the school?" asked the teacher, unbelieving. Then, strangely, he began to chuckle to himself.

"It's not funny, Leonard."

"Oh, come on, Mr. Guthrey. This idiocy's been going on for five years. Somebody calls and says there's a bomb in school." He turned to Heksher. "At first we used to take everybody outside. Like today. A couple of periods wasted every time it occurred. Finally we just started ignoring the calls. Nothing's ever happened. After all, any kid on his lunch hour with a dime in his pocket can pick up a phone and—"

"Take a look at this, Leonard," interrupted Heksher. "Guthrey got it in the morning mail." He handed the teacher a small square of paper.

The typing on the paper was single spaced. Mr. Strang perched his black-rimmed glasses on his nose and read:

There is a bomb in Aldershot High School. Please clear the building of all students and staff. The minutes are clicking away, and at 2:30 it will be too late. This is not an idle threat, and I have no wish to take human lives. Act now!

"You think this particular threat's real then?" asked the teacher.

"Leonard," said Heksher, "remember reading in the paper a couple of months ago about the church over in East Whorton? The explosion in the steeple that blew off half of the roof?"

"Why, yes, I think so. But—"

"The pastor got a note the morning of the day it happened. He didn't take it seriously either. After the explosion every police unit in the county got a copy of it."

He passed the teacher a photostat of a note.

I have planted a bomb in your church. Evacuate everyone, congregation, clergy and custodians. As the seconds tick by, 4:15 draws nearer. Please believe I mean what I say, but I don't wish physical harm to anyone. Act now!

"The g's in both notes have a little gap in the upper loop," said the chief. "I'm sure they're from the same—"

"Yes, I see," murmured the teacher. "That church was almost a hundred years old. A pity what happened to it."

"I don't like to think what could have happened to the people

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inside," replied the chief. "There was a service going on at 4:15. Luckily the roof timbers didn't give way, and nobody was hurt."

"I read of a similar case about a month or so ago," interrupted Mr. Strang. "Iron Wells—the Town Hall. Do you think that was—"

Heksher nodded and produced another photostat.

A bomb has been placed in the Iron Wells Town Hall. Everybody must leave, politicians and public alike. The hours glide on, and 5:00 will be here sooner than you think. I am serious about this; however I don't want a death on my conscience. Act now!

"That time the police knew better, and the building was evacuated," said Heksher. "The bomb squad searched the whole place. Couldn't find a thing. But at five o'clock on the nose, boom! The blast took off the whole front of the building. Brand-new. It couldn't have been up more than a year or so."

"Okay, I agree that whoever sent this note has to be taken seriously," said the teacher. "But why me, Cory?"

"Huh?"

"You let all the other teachers go home," said Mr. Strang. "Why was I elected to be placed in danger? I don't know much about bombs, but when it comes to being a coward, I'm at the top of the list."

"Because, Leonard," said Guthrey, "you've taught in this building more years than anyone else. You've seen it grow from a small school to what it is now. Three separate additions, and you were here when every one of them was built."

"But what's that got to do with—"

"Everything," said Heksher. "You must know places in there where a bomb could be concealed that none of us would dream of. You've got to help us locate that thing before it goes off."

Mr. Strang was horrified. "You mean you want me to go *in* there?"

"Of course not." Heksher reached through the window of his car and grasped the radio microphone. "All right, bring it in," he said.

A moment later a flat-bed truck painted a brilliant red turned into the school driveway. On the rear was mounted what appeared to be a large open container of heavy-gauge steel. The single word DANGER was lettered on its doors in black paint.

"Doretti and Simmons," said Heksher. "From the county bomb

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squad. I had 'em keep out of sight until we cleared out all the kids. We don't want anybody going into a panic."

The two men who got out of the truck were wearing body protectors, and each carried a metal helmet which was made to cover the entire head, with a single thin slit to see through. The effect was that of a pair of baseball umpires who had decided to take up welding.

"We'll stay right here," said Heksher after the introductions had been made. "These two will go inside. I'll be in contact with them by walkie-talkie."

"Better you than me," said Mr. Strang to Doretti. "Going in there takes more nerve than I've got."

"All part of the job."

"The custodial staff is still inside," said Guthrey. "After I called you, I instructed them to search all lockers and classrooms."

Mr. Strang's eyebrows shot up. "Isn't that dangerous?"

"I don't think so," said Heksher. "The other two bombs went off at the exact time stated in the note. Besides, whoever hid that thing would know the lockers and rooms would be the first places we'd look. We're fairly sure he'd choose a better spot. But we have to know for certain."

He turned to Guthrey. "How much longer, Marvin?"

The principal glanced at his watch. "The whole process usually takes about two hours," he said. "They should be finished in another fifteen minutes or so."

"That'll bring us up to about eleven o'clock," said Heksher. He pointed to Doretti and Simmons. "You two had better get busy. How about it, Mr. Strang? Where should they start?"

"One of them might try the boiler room," said the teacher thoughtfully. "It's right in the center of the building in a kind of half basement. The other?" He paused, thinking. "The main office and the guidance complex, I suppose."

As the two men headed toward the building, the side doors were suddenly flung wide, and a dozen men in gray work clothes burst out with expressions of relief on their faces.

One of them, a huge man with a gap-toothed grin, approached Guthrey. "They's nothin' in the lockers or the rooms," he said in a rich midwestern drawl. "We hauled out books an' everything. Left it kind o' messy, but we'll clean up tomorra. If they is a tomorra."

"Tell the men to go on home," said Guthrey. "Take the rest of the day off. Oh, and Sackett?"

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"Yessir?"

"Tell them I said thanks."

At 11:30 a gravelly voice was heard on the chief's walkie-talkie. "This is Sergeant Simmons. You there, Chief Heksher?"

"Yeah, Jerry. What have you got?"

"Nothing. Boiler room's clean unless the bomb's hid inside the plumbing. And the pipes don't look like they've been touched in years."

"How about Doretti?"

"He's done with guidance and the main office. Tell the principal that our master keys opened all the file cabinets, but we had to jimmy his desk. Sorry about that. It was all clean."

"Okay, hang on." Heksher turned to the teacher. "Where now, Mr. Strang?"

"Why, I . . . I don't know. Tell me, how big is this bomb supposed to be? I mean, is it some plastic explosive, or gunpowder poured into a pipe, or—"

"Dynamite, probably," was Heksher's answer. "We found traces of waxed paper and fuller's earth at both the church and the Town Hall. Four sticks, maybe five."

"What about the detonator?"

"I'd guess electric. With a couple of batteries and some kind of timing device—probably a cheap watch."

"I see. Then the whole thing would be about the size of a shoebox."

"Yeah, that would be about it."

Mr. Strang stared at the ground thoughtfully. "Tell one of your men to check the custodians' tool room. Particularly the big drums of sweeping compound. They'd hold a bomb easily."

Heksher relayed the instructions. "What about the other one, Mr. Strang?"

"Umm. Oh, yes, send him up to the bell tower. If the bomber tried that once, he might do it again. And on the way up the stairs, have him check out a little door on the first landing. There's a tiny room in there where I used to sneak naps." The teacher glanced at Guthrey. "When—uh—I was younger, of course."

"Of course." Guthrey shook his head in wonder. "I never even knew such a room existed," he said to Heksher.

"That's why I wanted Mr. Strang here," was the reply.

While they waited for the results of the search, Mr. Strang sat

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down on the running board of a fire engine and looked up at Heksher. "Why?" he asked.

"Why what, Leonard?"

"Why would anybody do a thing like this? Hide a bomb in a building full of kids, I mean."

"Hard to tell," was the answer. "A way to get attention, maybe. My job's just to locate that thing, Leonard. And, of course, to catch the man who hid it, if possible. I'll leave it to the head-shrinkers to figure out motives."

"It's pretty clear the man—if it *is* a man—didn't want anyone hurt. He certainly gave enough advance warning of his intentions. If he mailed that note yesterday or the day before, he had to know it would be delivered this morning."

"Yeah. And my bet is he's standing in that crowd beyond the police lines right now. He'd want to be on hand when the building blows."

"*When* it blows? You don't sound as if you have much confidence in those men inside," said Mr. Strang.

"I've got confidence in them, all right," said Heksher. "It's just that there are so many places and not enough time to cover them all."

As if to underscore Heksher's worry, Sergeant Simmons reported minutes later on the walkie-talkie that both the bell tower and the tool room had been searched without results.

12:30.

In the next hour the machines in the industrial arts shops were examined, the gym lockers were searched, and the soft-drink machine in the faculty room was dismantled.

Nothing.

"Only one hour to go," said Heksher glumly. "A little less, in fact. I want to pull those men out a few minutes early. Can't let them be inside when that thing does blow."

Mr. Strang suggested searching the cafeteria kitchen and the area above the false roof of the gymnasium.

At 1:55 both Simmons and Doretti reported no results.

Mr. Strang could feel the perspiration soaking into his collar. "What next?" asked Heksher, a desperate tone in his voice.

"Book rooms!" snapped the teacher waspishly. "Have 'em look in the book storage rooms. And lavatories. Yes, there's one that's sealed shut on the second floor. It's been out of commission since somebody pulled the sink away from the wall."

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Heksher barked the orders into the walkie-talkie. "And if you don't find anything get out!" he commanded. "Fifteen minutes is all I can give you. We can't be sure that kook's watch wasn't a little fast." He glanced at his own watch for reassurance as the teacher stared at him blankly.

"Don't feel bad, Mr. Strang," said Heksher. "You did the best you could."

"Something. Something." The teacher angrily pounded the knuckles of his right hand against the top of his balding head. "Something in those notes. Let me see them again, Cory. Please."

"Leonard, it's a little late to—"

Mr. Strang snapped his fingers impatiently. "The notes, Cory!"

With a shrug Heksher passed them over.

2:15.

2:18.

Heksher was about to call the men inside when Doretti reported in. "Nothing in the johns, Chief."

And immediately after, a one-word comment from Simmons.

"Nothing."

"All right, now I want you to get to the nearest exit and—"

"No!"

At the shout Heksher turned about, startled. Mr. Strang was holding up the notes triumphantly, looking somewhat like an ecstatic owl.

"Leonard, it's too late," said the chief. "I've got to—"

"No, you haven't! There's one more place!"

A voice came from the walkie-talkie. "What's all the shouting about?"

"All of a sudden teacher here thinks he knows where the bomb is. I'm going to leave it to you. Wanna try?"

A pause.

Then: "Okay. We'll take a chance."

Heksher extended the walkie-talkie to Mr. Strang. "Tell 'em, Leonard," he commanded. "Tell 'em where the bomb is."

So Mr. Strang told them.

"Just like he said." Sal Doretti shook his head and looked at the teacher. "A simple rig—we tore out the detonator by hand. The sticks of dynamite are over there in the back of the truck now. Harmless as a newborn kitten."

"Okay, Mr. Strang," added Simmons. "Give. How'd you know

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where we ought to look?"

"I'd be interested in the answer to that one myself," said Heksher.

"Very well." Mr. Strang whipped off his glasses, jabbing with them to punctuate his remarks. "The three notes. Quite similar, as you pointed out, Cory. Corresponding sentences in each gave practically the same information. Each note even has an alliterative phrase in sentence two. 'Congregation, clergy and custodians—politicians and public—students and staff.' And of course, the identical final sentence, 'Act now!'

"These similarities," the teacher went on, "disguised a single essential difference among the notes. A difference I'm sure the writer was quite unaware of."

"Get to the point, Leonard," pleaded Guthrey. "What difference?"

"Sentence three. In the first note; 'the seconds tick by.' In the case of the Iron Wells Town Hall; 'the hours glide on.' And today's letter tells us that 'the minutes are clicking away.' The conclusion is obvious. Whoever planted the bomb has more than a passing interest in clocks."

"It's hard to argue with results," said Doretti skeptically. "When we pried loose the face of the master clock in the main office, there was the dynamite staring us in the face, just like you said. With the batteries and detonator rigged to the clock mechanism itself. But I still don't see how you figured it out from what was said in the notes."

"Come on, Leonard," Guthrey said. "Admit it. You got lucky."

"Not at all," said Mr. Strang. "Consider—a hundred-year-old church. Its clock would be either spring-driven or operated by weights—a pendulum mechanism in any case. On such a clock wouldn't the time 'tick by'?"

"Hey, yeah," agreed Doretti. "And the new building in Iron Wells would have an electric clock in the lobby somewhere."

"With the hours 'gliding on'," nodded the teacher. "However, in Aldershot High School the classroom clocks are tied into the master clock. At the end of each minute the long hand of each clock jumps ahead. Accompanied by a distinct 'click,' I might add."

He paused, polished his glasses on his acid-stained necktie, then continued. "The notion of clocks was corroborated by the location of the first two explosions—a church steeple and the front of a public building. I asked myself what these two locations have in common."

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"Clocks," admitted Guthrey grudgingly. Suddenly he looked blankly at Heksher. "The repairman. He was here early this morning. Do you think he—"

"We know he did," said Heksher. "At Mr. Strang's suggestion I had my men out in front looking around for a truck from a clock-repair service. One of 'em spotted it up at the end of the block—with a few extra sticks of dynamite in the rear. Like I figured, the guy was just waiting around to get his jollies when the explosion occurred. He's in custody now, but it'll be up to the psychiatrists to say if he'll stand trial. It'll take a better man than I am to figure out what's going on inside his head."

As he turned to get into the police car, a bell mounted on the side of the school building rang loudly. Guthrey glanced at his watch. "Dismissal bell," he said to Heksher. "School's out. Right on time too."

The principal smiled sardonically. "Well, at least he managed to get our clock system working properly," he said.

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 444th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a moving "little drama" . . .

The author, Mary Diamond, writes that her "vocation is that of wife and mother," but she has "many avocations"—reading ("especially good mysteries"), gardening, and "touring historic Philadelphia" (where she was born, raised, and where she still lives). She is also deeply interested in politics and a keen fan of the Philadelphia Phillies baseball team.

Her second story? Perhaps it will have its origin in her experiences as a ward clerk in a Philadelphia hospital . . .

WAITING FOR EDDIE

by MARY DIAMOND

One evening in the early 1930's a man sat in a parked car on a side street in South Philadelphia. He was waiting for Eddie Hollander to come out of a house a few doors down and since he had got there ahead of schedule he absently drew a crumpled cigarette from a pack, put a match to it, and settled back to wait.

He gazed idly out the car window from time to time and gradually his attention was caught by the activities of three little girls at play under the gaslit street lamps. He had pulled up so as to be out of the scope of its wavering illumination.

The two older girls, about nine, were on roller skates, gliding up and down the length of the block serenely oblivious of the youngest one, seven at the most, who pursued them on foot with flailing arms and words of entreaty.

"Give *me* a turn, now. Mommy said the skates belong to bofe of us. Don't be such a meanie."

Her sister kept whirling past her with regal disdain, conducting a shouting conversation with her friend as she went. After a few minutes of watching, the man in the car began mumbling to himself, "Go on, sis. Give the kid a turn. What a meanie."

Absorbed as he had become in the little drama, he didn't forget

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to keep an eye peeled for Eddie. At length the older sister gave in to her sibling's beseeching and plunking herself on the curb she impatiently unstrapped the skates and thrust them at the eagerly outstretched hands. The youngest one quickly put them on and in her haste to get going stumbled as she straightened up and fell flat on the sidewalk.

But she was up in a twinkling, the man in the car watching her every move as she took off down the block with astonishing speed, her hair swirling. At the far corner she came to a sliding stop, twirled around with the grace of a butterfly, and came joyously back up the street again, whooping her delight. Back and forth she flew, free and new as the morning.

The man whistled his appreciation. "Bee-you-tee-ful!" he thought, but all too soon big sister reclaimed the treasures and the little one flopped on a doorstep, chagrined, her tiny fists supporting her chin.

"It ain't fair," she called after them, shut out from Paradise.

"It ain't, neither," thought the man in the car. Suddenly he snapped his fingers. He had an impulse. After first shooting a glance in the direction of the house Eddie was in, he lowered the car window and called the little girl to him. She peered this way and that, then finally locating where the voice had come from she ran to the car. The man poked his head out the window and looked at her. Cute as a button she was, close up, with freckles splashed across her snub nose like a broken sunbeam and with her midnight-colored hair. He grinned.

"Hiya."

"Hiya," she replied.

"Didn't your mother tell you never to talk to no strange men?"

Her reply to this triple negative was a single affirmative.

"Yeah. And my Pop too. But you're a nice man."

"How can you tell?"

She shrugged, disdaining to grant the dignity of a reply.

"Would yuh do me a favor?"

"Sure."

"Do yuh know where Weber's Hardware Store is, down on Snyder Avenue? It stays open nights."

"Yeah, sure." Her sister and the other girl, curious, had edged up behind her.

The man put a five-dollar bill he had taken from his pocket into the little one's hand.

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"Will you go down and buy a pair of skates for me?"

The trio stared at him. He chuckled.

"They're not for me," he assured them, then came up with the clincher. "You can keep the change," he said with a sweep of the hand that included the three of them. "And also the skates," he added to himself, for he expected to be gone when they returned.

This offer was met with handclaps and yelps and they set off for Snyder Avenue, skating and running like the wind. Smiling, he watched them disappear from view.

Suddenly he stiffened, every nerve alert. Eddie Hollander had come out of the house and was still on the front step when he spotted the man, now out of the car and coming quickly toward him. Eddie hurried in the opposite direction, trying to avoid an encounter, but the man easily overtook him and invited him into the car. Hollander declined, but the other persuaded him to get in. Then the man took Eddie for a ride.

"Q"

This is the 445th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a story that will haunt you . . .

The author, Jack Kelly, was 27 when he submitted his first story and was living in upstate New York where he has spent most of his life. Over the years he has "held a number of varied jobs—taxi driver, bartender, short-order cook, and computer coding supervisor." He recently returned from a three-year stay in Ireland where he divided his time "between restoring a Nineteenth Century bakery and working as a research assistant for a government project studying the Irish language." At the time of this writing he is still in upstate New York, now doing construction work and devoting some of his leisure to Shotokan karate and distance running.

Mr. Kelly was introduced to the mystery-detective field through books by Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and James M. Cain. So perhaps you know what to expect in his first story. No, you will be surprised—it is as far removed from the hardboiled school as you can possibly imagine. . .

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A TALE TOLD AT DUSK

by JACK KELLY

"Hey, boy, you ever seen a ghost? Now I don't mean one of them fellas with a sheet over his head. I mean somebody that ain't no longer there but you see them just like they was.

"Sometimes I see your Mama like that. Especially in the evenings when I'm kind of tired, I'll see her walking up the lane or doing the chores around the house. Sometimes she'll come out on the porch there like she used to and be waiting for me to come in from milking the cows or be calling you in to supper or just be staring down towards the meadow like she was trying to see something real far away."

The day was relaxing into evening around the shabby farmhouse and a few distant crickets began to take the pulse of night. They both leaned on the big oak that shaded the side yard, the man standing, his son sitting with his legs drawn up. Beneath the man's leathery farmer's face there was a certain pallor. His sharp squinting eyes flicked around as he spoke as if they itched. The boy's face was an unfinished carving of his father's, with the deep lines and knots of pain only hinted at. The man spoke in a coarse, low-pitched drawl. Often he had to stop and swallow or clear his throat before he could continue.

" 'Course I know that ain't really her 'cause she's dead, and it ain't even her spirit 'cause that's in heaven. A person's spirit don't hang around after they're dead, I know that. But it's like my eyes got so used to seeing her they just can't believe she's gone.

"Son, I know you been pretty miserable ever since the accident, and I know what a shock it is to lose your Mama so sudden like that. God knows I been feeling it myself real bad. But you can't go on moping like this. She wouldn't have wanted that. No, sir, she wanted you to go to college and make something out of yourself more than a plain old dirt farmer like me. She wouldn't have liked it if she thought you was going to sit around all day and sulk.

" 'Course when a fella loses his mother that's always hard. You remember how I sat down and cried when your Grandma passed away, and she'd led a full life. But if you let it affect you too

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much, then you ain't honoring her spirit. No matter how sad you feel you got to get on with things. Can't just sit."

The boy had hardly spoken to his father since the accident. He now sat breaking twigs and staring into the thickening gloom. The man knew the boy was considering his words deeply, but he wished he would speak his mind and not keep all the pain bottled up inside of him. That, the man figured, was really the heart of the problem, not just the mother's passing or the accident itself but that the boy had gotten so closed-mouthed afterwards that his grief was getting to be unnatural. The man wished there were some way he could get through to the boy and uncork the lid so his soul wouldn't suffocate.

"Don't think I don't know how you feel, son. There was never nothing nor nobody that meant as much to me as your Mama. Ever since the accident the whole world seems different to me without her around. And when I wake up in the morning I think to myself: Why should I get up? What's the use of it now? It seems like I can't find my blood no more. And whenever I seem to see her like I was telling you, a cold sweat comes over my insides."

The trees and the house were becoming black silhouettes against the sky. Darkness seeped up from the damp grass to thicken the twilight and the man had trouble making out the expression on the boy's face. But he felt that maybe he had touched the right chord, for the boy sat almost immobile as if in deep thought.

"You know what your Mama would always say to me when times got rough and I started feeling real low? She'd say: Look 'em in the eye, honey. And that's what you got to do if you want to be a man. You got to look the world in the eye just like—"

The boy suddenly jerked his head up as if awakening from a dream. On the porch the image of his mother appeared just as his father had described it, peering into the dusk. She seemed to be calling him. He stood up and started towards the house.

Darkness poured from the ground. The man was startled, then confused. "Wait a minute, son. I just want to know what you think of these things. We ain't finished talking yet."

The man moved in front of his son, but the boy kept going. He walked straight towards the house as if his father wasn't even there.

"Tomorrow," his mother said as the boy mounted the porch steps, "you got to go up and clip the grass on your Daddy's grave."

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WHAT HAPPENED TO ANNIE BARNES?

by EVAN HUNTER

(continued from page 17)

The fisherman's name was Giovanni Fabrizi. I found him in a bar in Santa Teresa and persuaded him to take me by boat to Piontelli's island. The island was still and dark except for some lights showing in the villa. Fabrizi dropped me off in a cove at the northern end, coming in as close as his draft allowed.

I paid him half of the agreed-upon price and told him I'd give him the rest when he picked me up again at midnight. I waded ashore then, my shoes in my hand, then sat on the sand and watched the boat as it moved out to sea. I put on my shoes and started for the villa.

There was the sound of explosions. Airplanes. Sirens.

A light was burning on the second floor of the villa, and the sounds were coming from behind a pair of partially opened balcony doors. I climbed a wooden trellis and silently moved closer to the doors. From where I crouched I could see only a portion of the room. The room was dark except for the luminous glow of the wall opposite the bed.

Annie was propped against the pillows, staring at the wall, her hands resting limply on the bedcovers, palms up. Projected onto the wall from somewhere behind it were motion picture images of bombs exploding and buildings crumbling. A title in white suddenly appeared on the wall screen—ROMA—a bomb exploded, shattering the script lettering. The noise in the room was deafening—the whistling of bombs, the cacophony of engines, explosions, sirens. A little auburn-haired girl in gray-striped smock and black stockings ran into the filmed street, screaming in panic as the bombs fell everywhere around her. "Mama!" she shrieked. "Papa!"

On the bed my wife backed away from the images in horror.

And suddenly the Allied warplanes on the screen dissolved to an idyllic view of waves rolling in gently against a seashore. The sound of the explosions segued to the music of violins, and another title appeared on the screen in white—ISCHIA—and on the

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bed the terror left my wife's eyes, and a faint smile formed on her mouth as she continued watching the screen.

The same little girl, now in a bathing suit, was running along the shore, a puppy following her. In the distance, off screen, a woman called "Francesca! Francesca!" and the child stopped and turned to smile at the camera. A man with a walrus mustache entered the shot and picked up the little girl, lifted her high over his head, his arms extended. A redheaded woman was laughing, the puppy dog was barking and nipping at the man's heels. The camera panned to the shorefront and lingered on the waves. Hypnotically the waves rolled in against the beach.

A man's voice whispered, "Francesca?"

Without turning her eyes from the screen she said, "Yes, Dr. Kleber?" Her voice was weak, without timbre or inflection.

"In Italian, Francesca," Kleber said. I did not know who he was. She had called him Doctor. Was he the man who had pushed a needle into my arm yesterday morning? "Italian is your language," he said now.

I tried to see into the portion of the room from which his voice was coming, but the drapes inside the mullioned doors cut the view.

"Francesca?" he said.

"*Si, che vuole?*" she answered.

"Italian *is* your language, isn't it?"

"*Si, certo.*"

"You were born in Italy, weren't you, Francesca?"

"*Si.*"

"Where were you born?"

"*A Roma.*"

"Who is this man?" Kleber asked, and suddenly the screen opposite the bed flashed a still photograph of the man with the walrus mustache.

"*Il mio padre,*" she said.

"Yes, your father. What is his name?"

"Silvio Di Luca."

"And this woman?"

The screen flashed a still photograph of the redheaded woman who had earlier been laughing on the beach.

"*La mia madre.*"

"Yes, your dear mother. What is her name?"

"Bianca Di Luca."

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"Where are they now, your mother and father?"

"*Sono morti, tutt'e due.*"

"How did they die?"

"There was an American bombing raid—"

I heard only a tiny click, almost like the sound of someone snapping his fingers—a harmless click, almost inaudible. And yet, as surely as though someone had thrown a switch, she winced at the sound of the click, and her features suddenly contorted in pain.

"In Italian, Francesca," Kleber said.

Trembling, she took a moment before answering, and when she did, she spoke very slowly and very carefully, in precise Italian.

"*Durante un'incursione americano a Roma quando ero bambina piccola,*" she said, "*tutt'e due i genitori furono uccisi.*"

"Yes," Kleber said. "And you were left an orphan."

"*Si.*"

"Say it, please."

"*Fui lasciata*—I don't know how to say 'orphan'."

The click sounded again and her reaction to it seemed stronger this time. I almost rushed into the room in that instant. But even if she were alone in there, even if Kleber were not actually beside the bed where I couldn't see him, he was most certainly watching from somewhere—observing her reactions, listening to her, producing the clicking sound that triggered pain though no pain-inducing mechanism was anywhere in evidence. I wondered now how often in the past three weeks that tiny click had signaled *real* pain to come.

"You know how to say it in Italian," he said.

"No, please, I—" There was another click. "*Un'orfana,*" she shouted, "*un'orfana*!"

"Yes," Kleber said.

On the bed Annie began weeping.

"You are tired, Francesca," Kleber said. "I will let you sleep now."

"Yes. Thank you."

"In Italian."

"*Grazie, dottore. Buona notte.*"

"Good night, Francesca. Sleep now. Sleep well."

On the wall opposite the bed the waves appeared again, rolling incessantly toward the shore. The weeping subsided. The only sound in the room now was the murmur of surf against sand. I

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waited. From the bed I could hear her gentle breathing. Was Kleber in the room with her? Or still watching from someplace other than the room?

I looked at my watch. It was close to eleven. I had told Fabrizi to pick me up in the cove at midnight. I waited now, uncertain of my next move. Surely they wouldn't continue to watch her all night long. Once they were certain she was asleep—

I listened to her breathing.

At ten minutes past eleven I went into the room. The motion-picture images of the lulling waves had faded three minutes before. The wall looked like nothing more than a wall now, a flat white surface. There was no one in the room with her, but I did not know if we were being watched by a camera eye. I went swiftly to the bed.

"Annie," I whispered, "wake up."

She mumbled in her sleep, and there was a faint medicinal scent clinging to her. I threw back the covers and was bending to lift her from the bed when a voice behind me said, "Good evening, Thomas."

I turned abruptly. The wall was covered now with a full-screen, black-and-white image of Piontelli. He was smiling.

"I see you are back," he said. "What do you want here, Thomas?"

"My wife."

"Your wife is dead. She fell from the roof of the Duomo—"

"*Someone* fell from the roof of the Duomo, but it wasn't Anne Barnes."

"She was identified as Anne Barnes," Piontelli said.

"Who identified her?"

"Her husband."

"Like hell! One of your stooges identified her, and buried her and—"

"What difference does it make? Who in Italy knows either of you? A girl, whoever she was, was buried in Milano, and a grieving husband was at her graveside. Whatever else—"

"Why are you doing this?"

"Because I want her."

"You *want* her? Who the hell do you think you are? You see someone you want, and you—"

"Exactly."

"—take her and change her to suit your—"

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"She was *ready* to be changed," Piontelli said. "I only served as the catalyst."

"You haven't got Annie Barnes. All you've—"

"I have Francesca," he said. "From the moment I first saw you together in Rome—"

"When was that?"

"Last month. At the Hassler. I had gone there to dine with a friend. In Italy it is possible to make discreet inquiries. I found out who you were and where you were going from Rome. You see . . . she was Francesca exactly. The resemblance was uncanny. I had to—"

"Francesca died in 1937!"

"Ah?" he said, surprised. "You know this?"

"When are *you* going to know it? Annie's *not* Francesca. Whatever your witch doctor's done to her—"

"Ah, but of course I know this," Piontelli said. "Annie is—" He hesitated a moment, searching for the appropriate English words. In Italian he said, *"Una immagine idealizzata, rifinita a perfezione.* The *ideal*, do you see? I have created the ideal. *My* Francesca was poor and ignorant. The one I've fashioned was educated in Florence, has traveled to London, Paris, and New York, a different person altogether. *My* Francesca died of influenza in Rome, where I took her with her parents thirty-eight years ago. The Francesca on the bed there is an orphan, the victim of an Allied air raid, but very much alive, *non è vero*?"

"You're deluding yourself," I said. "They may *look* alike, but—"

"Delusion? Perhaps," he said, and smiled. "But such a pleasant way to spend my waning years, don't you agree? I've brought Francesca back to life. I took Anne Barnes and changed her into a girl I once knew and loved. And no one can change her back again. Perhaps Dr. Kleber, yes. But certainly not you."

"I can try."

"You will fail."

"I'll take that chance. You can't keep her drugged and hypnotized forever."

"Is that all you think it is? Then you're the one who's deluded. Talk to her," he said. "You will find only *un'ombra istruita*—an educated ghost."

The screen blanked out.

The woman on the bed awakened at a little past 2:00 A.M. She

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did not see me at first. Her eyes fluttered open, and she took a deep breath and let it out, then yawned, then blinked into the room. Her face registered only mild surprise when she saw me sitting in the chair beside the bed.

"Did you sleep well?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. "Thank you."

"Do you know where you are?"

"Of course I know where I am."

"Do you know who I am?"

"Yes."

"Who am I?"

"Thomas Barnes."

"And who are *you*?" I asked.

"You know very well who I am," she said. "Francesca Piontelli." She got off the bed. She was wearing a long cotton nightgown, but she went immediately to a chair where a robe was draped. Putting on the robe, her back modestly turned to me, she said, "Where's my husband?"

"I'm your husband," I said.

She went to the door and reached for the bolt.

"Leave that locked," I said.

"Why?" she asked. "Am I a prisoner?"

"Yes. But not mine."

"In that case I am free to leave when I wish."

"No."

"Then I *am* your prisoner."

"My guest, let's say."

"Your prisoner, let's say. I thought you'd left the island."

"I did."

"And now you're back."

"Bad penny," I said, and smiled. She did not return the smile. "Annie," I said, "I haven't—"

"My name is Francesca," she said.

"I haven't had a drink since this started," I said. "Not a drop."

"That is of no interest to me," she said.

"It's why we came to Italy."

"I have been here in Italy since long before you arrived."

"Annie, I was drinking too much. We came here on vacation to try to save our marriage. We thought if we could only—"

"My name is Francesca Di Luca Piontelli," she said.

"Annie, I mean it this time. I swear to you I'll—"

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"I was born in Rome on March eleventh—"

"Annie, for God's sake—"

"When I was a little girl I went to the Misericordia School. I wore long black stockings and a striped smock. The nuns sometimes beat us with birch rods. That's how I got the scar."

"What scar?" I said.

"On my arm. I raised my arm to defend myself."

"You . . . you don't have a scar, Annie."

"Oh, but I most certainly have. Would you like to see it?" She lifted her left arm in the position she would have used to ward off a blow. With her right hand she pulled back the sleeve of the robe. Just above the wrist there was a scar some two inches long.

"It's not very attractive," she said.

I stared at the scar. Annie did not have a scar on her arm. For an instant, just an instant, I doubted whether this woman pulling back the sleeve of her robe was really my wife. The instant was time enough. The doubt opened a channel through which all the false memories rushed. I heard Dr. Kleber's voice saying, *"You told her not to go too close,"* and saw again in vivid detail the girl in the yellow dress leaning over the parapet to look at the piazza below. I tried to reject the memory, but pain suddenly flashed inside my head, the punishment for refusing to believe.

"In sunshine—the cathedral in sunshine. The roof. A yellow dress. Don't you remember the yellow dress?"

"No," I said, and tried to conjure the *real* memory of what had happened—the road to Milan, the rented red Fiat speeding through the deepening dusk, the car radio up full. In the *real* memory, there were sudden headlights in the road ahead. I slowed the car, we rolled to a stop, and I saw three armed men standing in the road.

My first thought was that they were policemen—they were dressed in black, black trousers and jackets, black caps—and then Annie said only my name, "Thomas!" and my hands tightened on the steering wheel because I knew these were not policemen, I knew this was trouble.

They threw open the car doors. Two of them seized Annie—she was wearing a yellow cotton dress. I heard her screaming, I tried to break away from the man who was pulling me out of the automobile. That was all I could remember, but I knew it was the *true* memory, knew that whatever else I *thought* had happened after that night was false—as false as Annie's death.

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But I could not shake the image of the girl in the yellow dress. Whatever they had done to me, whatever memories they had implanted and repeated endlessly, whatever voices and images had been insistently forced on me, the results were effective and lasting. I found myself physically moving toward the non-existent girl as she leaned out over the parapet, heard myself shouting aloud, "Annie, don't—Annie, be careful!"

Suddenly she lost her balance. I reached out, grabbed for the yellow cotton of her dress, and in a dizzying blur she fell over the edge. The piazza below was tiled in black and white, a geometrically patterned mosaic. The girl's scream shattered the torpid summer stillness as her body struck the tiles with bone-crushing . . .

"No!" I shouted.

The pattern of the black and white tiles lingered, refused to fade, like neon that had died and left an afterglow. Slowly the room came into focus again, objects regained definite form and color. I found her, looked into her eyes, and realized in despair that Piontelli had been right—there was no bringing Annie back.

The indoctrination had been too strong, it could still overcome me with pain and false memory whenever I allowed the slightest doubt to intrude on reality. And Annie? What did she know of the truth, what did she even suspect of anything that had happened to her during these past several weeks? She had indeed become Francesca Piontelli, an educated ghost.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm—I'm all right now."

She was looking at me oddly. Her eyes were puzzled.

"Mr. Barnes?" she said, and hesitated. "Thomas?" she said. "Do I know you?"

I caught my breath.

"I thought I knew you," she said. "Just then." She paused. "And once before."

"When?" I asked.

She turned her head away abruptly. "I don't remember," she said.

"You *do* remember."

"Yes. I do remember."

"When was it?"

She would not look at me, she kept her head turned away. "This morning," she said. "When you kissed me."

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I lifted my hand. I dared to take her chin in my cupped hand, risked turning her face toward mine, and gently, cautiously, I lowered my mouth to hers.

"No," she said. "Please don't."

"Why?"

"I'm married," she said. "I love my husband. I—"

My lips brushed hers. She moved her mouth from mine, and looked into my eyes, and I kissed her again, and again she pulled away, and shook her head, and said, "I shouldn't remember your mouth—but I do."

"Annie," I said, "Francesca, whoever you are . . . I love you."

"No, please," she said. "You mustn't."

I took her in my arms, held her close, covered her lips with mine, and this time she responded, and when at last she pulled away, her voice was breathless. "And you," she said, "whoever *you* are—"

There was no warning. There was only the sudden sound of something heavy hitting the oak door, and then the bolt sprang free of the jamb. I leaped to my feet, but they were already in the room, Bruno following the door as it swung inward, Piontelli immediately behind him. Bruno had a pistol in his hand.

"We are finished here," Piontelli said to me. "Francesca!"

"Yes, Marco?" she said immediately, and one hand went to the collar of her robe and pulled it closer to her throat.

"We are leaving for Greece at sunrise," he said. "You must pack. I know you do not wish to appear rude to our American guest, but I think you should begin now. You will forgive her, Mr. Barnes? Bruno, take Francesca to her—"

I threw myself at Bruno and grabbed for his wrist, and the pistol went off twice as we struggled across the room. Both my hands were wrapped around his wrist. We smashed into the wall on which the motion picture images had flashed earlier, went into it and through it, glass splintering around us, and still I clung to his wrist. Piontelli was shouting.

We were on the floor now, Bruno and I, locked in sweaty struggle. I brought his forearm to my mouth, bit down hard, sank my teeth into the muscle, and he screamed in pain. He opened his fingers and the gun dropped to the floor. I hit him then. I had not had a fist fight since I was twelve years old, but I hit him with all the strength of my arm and shoulder, and I kept hitting him until he fell back to the floor unconscious. My hand hurt, I had hurt it

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on his jaw. I turned away from him. The gun—where was it?

Annie had picked up the gun. It looked ridiculously large in her delicate hand.

"Good girl," Piontelli said. "Give it to me."

"No," she said, and shook her head.

"Give me the gun, Francesca," he said.

"No."

"I told you to go pack," he said. "Now give—"

"Why are we going to Greece?" she asked.

"To be married," he said. *"Dammi la pistola."*

"We are already married," she said.

"The church wedding, Francesca," he said quickly. "Because the other, when we were married in Rome—"

"You were never married in Rome," I said. "There's no record of a marriage in Rome."

"Francesca," he said, "I know you remember. It was a civil ceremony, do you remember? But you said you wanted to be married in church later on. So tomorrow . . . I'm sure you remember, darling. It was your express wish that we be married again in church. Don't you remember, Francesca?"

She hesitated a long time before answering. Then, slowly, precisely, and in English, she said, "No, Marco. I *don't* remember."

"Maledetta, dammi quella pistola!" he shouted, and reached for the gun. She thrust it forward sharply, threateningly, and he realized in that instant that she would shoot him if he took another step. His face fell, his shoulders slumped. He looked at her one last time before we rushed out of the room.

We ran down the steps and through the terrace doors. I did not know where to take her. The boat had surely left long ago. We kept running up the beach. They would come after us, I knew they would. Piontelli would send Bruno or some of the others.

The searchlight illuminated half of the beach. It burst into brilliance at our feet and stopped us dead in our tracks. I expected someone to shoot at us the next moment, then I realized the light was coming from the *sea,* and I heard a voice I hadn't expected to hear again tonight.

"Signore! It's me! Giovanni Fabrizi!"

We ran down to the water's edge and splashed into the sea. The villa was still, the island was still. She shucked her robe as we swam to the boat and when we climbed aboard, she was shivering. Fabrizi threw a blanket around her shoulders, and then

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gunned the boat out of the cove. I sat in the stern with her. She was trembling in my arms. I looked back toward the villa. Was that Piontelli standing on the terrace? I could not be certain.

Fabrizi turned from the wheel.

"I thought you'd be gone by now," I said.

"Why? You owe me money still. You are okay?" he asked.

"I am okay," I said.

"And you, lady?"

"*Anch'io, salva,*" she said.

"Ah?" he said, surprised. "*É italiana*? The lady is Italian?"

"*Si,*" she said, and nodded.

I looked at her. I searched her face for the slightest trace of uncertainty or doubt, but none was there. I was sitting beside a strange and beautiful woman who now knew she wasn't married to Marco Piontelli, but who never in a million years would believe she was married to me. I was sitting beside Francesca Di Luca, 34 years old and single. And she had met an American who'd told her he loved her.

Now all I had to do was prove it.

"Yes," I said. "She's Italian."

"Q"

NEXT MONTH . . .

12 *NEW* stories — including

EDWARD D. HOCH *(about Nick Velvet)*

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam: Johnson story by
LILLIAN de la TORRE

Some critical comments are worth being repeated. In his excellent study of the genre, MORTAL CONSEQUENCES, *Julian Symons wrote: "The detective stories about Johnson and Boswell . . . are perhaps the most successful pastiches in detective fiction . . . Miss de la Torre caught most happily the tone and weight of Johnson's conversation . . ."*

How true is Mr. Symons' judgment. And verily no one but Lillian de la Torre could have written this newest tale of Dr. Sam: Johnson with as much authenticity and grace. The "tone and weight" of Boswell's style are "caught most happily" . . .

THE AEROSTATICK GLOBE

(As told by James Boswell, 1783–4)

by LILLIAN de la TORRÈ

PROLOGUE

The time: Spring, 1783
The place: The residence of Dr. Sam: Johnson, lexicographer and detector, in Bolt Court, Fleet Street, London
The topick: Aerostation
The interlocutors: Dr. Johnson, bulky of person, quick of intellect, clad in full-skirted russet coat and a little brown scratch-wig; and myself, James Boswell, his friend and biographer, short of stature, sharp of nose, turned out in pea-green broadcloth with my own long dark hair in a modish bag.

BOSWELL: Pray, Dr. Johnson, what is this aerostatick globe we hear so much about?
JOHNSON: Why, sir, I will tell you. An aerostatick globe is, in brief, sir, a globe constructed of some light material, as it might be silk or paper, filled with an aether so nearly weightless it must inevitably rise in air.

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BOSWELL: I marvel where such an aether is to be found.

JOHNSON (smiling): Why, sir, at the tops of mountains, so Signor Torricelli's barometer tells us; but none has yet devised a means to bring some down. Or by heating, they say, air becomes rarefied. Or there is a lighter aether still, newly described by Mr. Henry Cavendish. He calls it "inflammable air,"* filled with which, is it pretty to see soap bubbles, and even silken balls, sent soaring.

My imagination, ever warm, caught fire.

"Then why may not man also, by this means, scale the heavens?" I exclaimed in excitement.

If my fancy is warm, my friend's common sense is cool.

"A meer toy," he replied, "fit for ladies and weanlings on a summer day. And the better so. If men were all virtuous, one might wish they all could fly. But what would be the security of the good, if the bad could at pleasure invade them from the sky? Against an army sailing in the clouds, neither walls, nor mountains, nor seas, could afford any security. A flight of northern savages might hover in the wind, and light at once with irresistible violence upon the capital of a fruitful region that was rolling under them."

BOSWELL: Why, sir, I perceive you quote *Rasselas*.

JOHNSON (smiling): And who has a better right?—since the words are my own: writ long ago, yet true as ever. I will not willingly see a man-carrying machine rise in air. Who knows what mischiefs may ensue?

BOSWELL: Nay, sir, I hope not.

JOHNSON: Well, well, we may be at ease. From earliest ages man has essayed to fly, and never succeeded. King Bladud of Britain tried it long ago, so records Geoffrey of Monmouth; but his pride ended in his fall. Or what do you say to the Flying Abbot of Tungland, who would swoop on wings from the battlements of Stirling Castle, and broke his bones? Or do you believe that Cyrano de Bergerac ascended to the moon with the dew, or by the lodestone? No, sir; dreams of flight are but phantasy.

Thus did we speak together in that year of 1783, little foreseeing the part we should soon play in the launching of the first aerostatick globe to carry a man into English skies. Tho' in his declining years asthmatick and by fits dropsical, Dr. Sam: Johnson retained to the last his keen intellect, lively curiosity,

*Later called hydrogen

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and humane sympathies. Despite his misgivings, the experiments of the aerostatick globe were bound to engage his earnest attention and support.

Man's dreams of flight were on the point of becoming reality. It was over France that a man-carrying globe first rose in air. This "ballon" or great ball was constructed of silk and paper by two brothers named Montgolfier. In November, 1783, filled with heated air, it carried a young chymist, one Pilâtre de Rozier, into the heavens. Immediately thereafter, another man of science, J. A. C. Charles, filled another "ballon" (*Anglice,* balloon) with the Cavendish inflammable air, by means of which he, too, ascended; and soon a projector named Jean-Pierre Blanchard followed suit.

Swiftly Britain caught the balloon fever. From Land's End to John o' Groats, everyone wanted to fly. Visiting Oxford in June, Dr. Johnson and I encountered there a would-be balloonist, one James Sadler, a solid young man of no pretensions but much industry and determination, whose scheams of flight so impressed us that Dr. Johnson handsomely presented him with a barometer to further them. That same summer, in Edinburgh, I beheld James Tytler trying to launch himself in air with his curious cylindrical aerostatick machine; but his attempt was ill-fated.

Equally ill-fated was a hot-air balloon contrived in London by a charlatan who called himself the Chevalier de Moret. It was shaped like a Chinese pagoda, and proved no more air-worthy than a pagoda. A riot ensued, the balloon was burned, and Moret, narrowly escaping the same fate, made off with the profits. That was in August, 1784. That same month, a hot-air balloon constructed for the eccentrick anatomist, Dr. John Sheldon, by an umbrella-maker in the Strand, refused to rise, and English skies remained unconquered.

Thus matters stood when in September Dr. Sam: Johnson came home from a visit to the country, and I joined him in London.

We found our friends in London quite balloon-mad. At the Club, all the talk was balloon. When we went to our good friend Mr. Biggin, the rich merchant, in his house in Bunhill Row, in the withdrawing room the same refrain was heard. The Biggin daughters could talk of nothing else. Miss Fidelity, a comely young lady like a miniature china shepherdess, uttered the magick word with a look of exaltation. Miss Charity, a hoydenish schoolgirl as small as her sister, and slighter of form, stuttered it out in excitement. Mr. George, the son of the house, like his sis-

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ters diminutive of make and handsome of face, had the most to say.

"Have you seen Mr. Lunardi's balloon? It is on view at the Lyceum in the Strand. For a guinea one may visit it where it hangs, and have a chair in the fields to see it ascend—"

"*If* it ascends," remarked Dr. Johnson, "we shall all see it at no expense."

"There are many," remarked old Mr. Biggin drily, "so it is reputed, who will give their guinea only to see the 'aeronaut,' for as the ladies aver, he is a beautiful young man."

"And a brave one," put in young George. "I am honoured to be his friend and supporter."

"Why then," said I, "I'd give a trifle, tho' perhaps not a guinea, to see this paragon."

"You may see him for nothing, sir," said old Mr. Biggin, cocking his good ear to listen, "for here he comes now."

A mellifluous voice from the hall heralded the new arrival, and on the heels of the servant who announced him, there he was—Vincenzo Lunardi, age 25, native of Lucca, secretary to the Neapolitan Amabassador, and baloonist extraordinary. He was indeed a beautiful young man, with aristocratic nose, well-shaped cleft chin, melting eyes, springing curls scarce to be confined by a riband. His tall, erect figure was adorned in sea-green laced with silver. He lavished graceful bows, dazzling smiles, and languishing glances, as appropriate, upon the company.

Made known to us, he spoke in a warm voice only slightly tinged with another musick: "Your servant, Signori. I present my friend Ragamuffin."

No friend appearing at eye level, I looked down, and beheld a small shagged dog of motley appearance, who immediately sat up and offered his paw with a civil, responsible air. I took it, which appeared to gratify the creature, for he got off his rump and wagged his whole back end violently.

Ragamuffin had obviously intended to be a King Charles spaniel, but somewhere in his blood line a terrier had intruded, lengthening his snout and giving him tan eyebrows and disorderly whiskers. For the rest, King Charles had prevailed, in feathery black-and-white plumage and bright attentive amber eyes.

The eyes were fixed adoringly on Miss Charity. In a swoop, Miss was on the floor, gathering the little dog to her bosom.

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"Cherry!" reproved Miss Fidelity. "Rise up and mind your manners. But indeed, sirs, you must excuse her fondness: Ragamuffin was born in this house, and learned deportment of her, before Signor Lunardi chose him for a companion."

Miss Charity arose with the wiggling dog in her arms, while his new master took up his stance by the chimney-piece. At this juncture entered to us another caller, whom Dr. Johnson greeted cordially.

"What, Mr. Sadler, welcome to London! What brings you hither?"

"To see Mr. Lunardi's balloon," replied the Oxford balloonist.

What really brought Sadler to town, any eye could soon see, in the steadily intense regard he bent upon Miss Fidelity, and the colour that rose to his rugged countenance when his gaze met hers.

This was but by-play, for the beautiful young Italian by the chimney-piece held center stage as he discoursed of his balloon and his plans for it. His clear eyes flashed, his graceful hands were never still, his expressive voice, by turns a caress and a clarion, held us spellbound. All the Biggins hung on his words. Only Sadler glowered.

"And," concluded the aeronaut graciously, "I desire to see you all at the Lyceum in the Strand to-morrow in the morning, when I shall do myself the honour of displaying to you my grand balloon. You, too, Sadler, if you chuse."

So it was concerted, and we took our leave; but Lunardi and Sadler sat on.

On the Monday accordingly we presented ourselves at the Lyceum. Tho' built for a picture gallery, the Great Room was lofty and spacious, roomy enough to receive Mr. Lunardi's aerostatick globe. Filled with ordinary air, by what powerful bellows I know not, it hung from the dome, a majestick sight, a great globe 33 feet high, striped with gores of red and blue silk, sealed with some sort of glistening varnish. The upper hemisphere was clasped by a reticulation of ropes, which dangled down ready to secure the car that should receive the passengers. Among the ropes dangled down the neck of the balloon, by which when the time came the inflammable air would be inserted.

Grouped beneath the great globe clustered our friends from Bunhill Row. Mr. Biggin the younger, as the aeronaut's most par-

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ticular coadjutor, appeared in a modish maroon broadcloth, with ruffles of Venetian lace. Miss Fidelity was breathtaking in peach-coloured taffety with ruched furbelows. Mr. Sadler beside her was plain and sturdy in stone colour. Miss Cherry, in childish white muslin with a round sash, looked small and elfin.

On a leash of braided leather Miss Cherry held Ragamuffin, who sat by her on the alert. He clearly understood himself to be in charge of the balloon, for if anyone approached too close, the interloper was warned off with a sharp bark. Fortunately Miss Cherry had him well in hand. She had only to whisper *"Silentium!"* in the old schoolroom phrase, and no more was heard from Ragamuffin—till next time.

The Great Room was crowded with the opulent world of fashion and the select world of scientifick attainment. I saw and saluted our friend and fellow Club member, Dr. George Fordyce, rumpled and florid in appearance, a man learned in chymistry, who had devised a new and better means for producing the inflammable air necessary to carry Lunardi's balloon to the skies. Beside him I recognised the slighter figure of Dr. John Sheldon, the would-be balloonist; only the failure of the umbrella-maker's globe had prevented him from being himself the first to conquer English air. Now he was putting his hope of soaring in a new balloon, constructed by the French aeronaut, Blanchard.

With Dr. Sheldon was Blanchard himself, small and spare, no more than five feet high, a bird-like figure most fitted to soar to the sky. His boyish round face as he scanned Lunardi's great globe wore a look like a sneer, and his inclination to Lunardi was stiff and forbidding.

At another group of visitors I frankly stared: gentlemen of fashion, negligently attired in leather sleeve guards and green eye-shades—high-born gamesters just set down in the Strand after a night of gaming at Brooks's Club. They studied the aerostatick globe with calculating eye.

"Bejasers she won't fly. A rump and dozen she won't fly."

The speaker was our old friend from the Virtuosi, Sir Brutus O'Banion, a little the worse for wear, but as jaunty as ever.

"She *will* fly. I'll take you for the bottles and beef—"

"And I—and I—"

As O'Banion filled his betting book, we turned our attention to where, meanwhile, Signor Lunardi was blossoming under the caresses of the *haute monde*. I saw the Duchess of Devonshire, in

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a modish "good child" dimity gown with round sash, the centre of a glittering group. Beside her I discerned Mr. Horace Walpole, amusing them all with his phantasies.

"One of these days," he was saying, "if ballooning goes on at this rate, we shall turn to the gazettes for '*Air Mail Intelligence*'—as thus: 'The good balloon Daedalus, Captain Wing-ate, will fly in a few days for China; he will stop at the top of the Monument to take in passengers. Arrived on Brand Sands, the Dreadnaught, from Mount Aetna. Foundered in a hurricane, the Bird of Paradise, from Mount Ararat—' "

"Horrie, how you do go on!" tittered a lady of fashion.

"Yet I hope," he continued more thoughtfully, "that these new mechanick meteors will prove only playthings (flicking his eye over the crush) for the learned and the idle, and not be converted into new engines of destruction to the human race, as is so often the case of refinements or discoveries in science."

"There I am with you, sir," said Dr. Johnson.

"We may trust Signor Lunardi," smiled the beautiful Duchess. "Pray, Signor, will you not make known to us the companions of your flight?"

"Gladly, your Grace. I have the honour to make known my friend Mr. George Biggin, who will ascend with me; as also my dog, Ragamuffin—"

Muffin grinned with self-importance.

"Tschah," ejaculated Mr. Walpole sharply, heedless who heard, "this mountebank has perhaps the right to risk his own life, but not that of his poor dog!"

At this Miss Cherry, looking stricken, clasped Ragamuffin, and Lunardi cried excitably: "Ragamuffin is my *talismano!* The luck of my flight! Without him I do not fly!"

Walpole shrugged and withdrew. As we followed suit, we left the volatile Italian being coaxed back into bliss by the attentions of his high-born admirers.

All that week Lunardi fluctuated between the heights of bliss and the depths of despair. He is denied permission to ascend from Chelsea; he despairs. He receives permission to ascend from the Artillery Ground, hard by Bunhill Row; he cheers up. The Lyceum attaches his balloon on pretence of debt; he is cast into the depths. He retrieves it by a writ; hope is restored. He quarrels with a workman over a bill; the workman departs with threats.

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"*Maledetto*!" cries Lunardi. "He lies, that Backis! I owe him no such sum! Why must they cross me so!"

While he was still fuming, the next stroke struck him down. Darkness had fallen when he appeared at Bolt Court in disarray.

"All is over!" he cried. "It is not to be! I have lost my luck!"

"What, Ragamuffin?" said I, more affected than I should have anticipated. "Muffin is no more?"

"Worse. He is gone, his fate I do not know. You must find him, Dr. Johnson!"

"How did you come to lose him?"

"As you know, for you saw him there, he was on publick view at the Lyceum, guarding my globe—"

"True, on a leash, with folk all around."

"Whom I trusted, to my cost. I should never have left him to the care of others. As darkness fell, and the people were departing, I went off to sup with—but no matter, I was gone, when in comes a boy shouting, and the attendants all run out—"

"What could a street urchin shout, to make them leave their posts?"

"The one word," said the aeronaut wryly, "that could move them. He cried *Balloon*! And they all ran out to see. There was, of course, nothing to see. When they returned, Ragamuffin was gone. They pursued by the backward door, but too late to catch him up."

"What of the boy who cried *Balloon*?"

"He was gone, and took with him my talisman. My luck is gone. I shall never fly. Blanchard and Sadler may go first, I care not."

"Perhaps," said I thoughtfully, "it was so intended. You *must* fly, and frustrate your enemies."

"I cannot, unless Ragamuffin is found, and quickly, before they do him a mischief."

"Then we must find him. And first, we must make publick your loss. You shall carry a screed to the gazettes. Let me see. Write, Mr. Boswell."

I drew forth the writing materials I always carry about me to record my friend's noteworthy discourses.

"*STOLEN AWAY*. A small shagged Dog of a black and white colour, having tan Eyebrows, by name *Ragamuffin,* the Lapdog of the renowned Signor *Lunardi*: Whoever makes known his whereabouts, so that he may be recovered, shall be gratified by a Reward of—what price do you put upon the creature, Signor?"

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"My fortune, my life!" cried the Italian wildly.

"Somewhat excessive," observed Dr. Johnson drily. "Shall we say five pounds?"

I wrote five pounds, and so Signor Vincenzo departed in haste to catch the press.

On the morrow we presented ourselves betimes at Bunhill Row. There we found the household much put about over the fate of Ragamuffin, old Mr. Biggin in a fret, young Mr. Biggin objurgatory, Miss Fidelity weeping quietly into a dainty cambrick pocket handkerchief, Mr. Sadler in his stone-colour coat pleasurably administering consolation. Only Miss Cherry, the little dog's preceptress, was invisible, locked in her room to grieve.

Barely were greetings exchanged, when to us entered precipitately Signor Lunardi, disordered and unkempt. Without ceremony he brandished a scrap of paper as he cried: "Ragamuffin is heard of!"

He extended the paper. It said, in a sort of backhanded scrawl: "He is safe & will come home in three days."

"Three days! On Monday!" cried Lunardi. "But I must ascend as I promised, on Sunday, or it will be the worse for my balloon. You know the mob will never brook delay. Can you not find him out, Dr. Johnson?"

Johnson took the paper in his large, well-shaped fingers: a leaf from a copybook, folded like the darts that bad little boys make in the school-room.

"Whence came this paper?"

"It was found by the wash-house maid but now, in the rear yard. Some passer-by must have tossed it over the palings."

"Then the messenger is already gone beyond our reach. But be consoled, Signor, it seems they mean your talisman no harm."

"What good, if he is not returned in time?"

We were interrupted by a mighty summons from the front door. A serving man quickly admitted to us a fellow in gaudy green and gold livery, which was, as it soon transpired, that of the Neapolitan Ambassador. In a staccato salvo of Italian, he presented a billet to Lunardi, and withdrew with obeisances.

"Left for me at the Ambassador's door," said Lunardi, unfolding the billet. "What is this, is this English?"

I took the extended paper. It was English, vile enough indeed, and this was its purport:

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"Wee have youre Dog. 50 pnds to return him.
50 pnd notes in a cabbige at Covent Garden at sun-up.
Let him who carrys it give it to him who sayes A Penye for ye Ragamuffin. Who will then cum whoam.
Ye Know Nott Who"

"What are we to think of this?"

"That one of these billets is a fraud," replied Dr. Johnson. "Which is the liar, he who can spell 'come home,' or he who cannot?"

"Or both?" I suggested.

"It may well be, both. All the world now knows from the gazettes that Muffin is missing. Well, the first missive gives us no course of action, but the second does. We must go to Covent Garden and get a look at this dog-napper—"

"Dog-napper?"

"Thieves' cant. To nap is to steal: dog-napper, dog-stealer. Perhaps we'll nip the napper. Alas, I cannot go myself, but Mr. Boswell shall be my deputy. Pray, Mr. Biggin, is there ever a cabbage in the house?"

Miss Fidelity produced a mighty cabbage from the cold-cellar, and Mr. Sadler, a deft mechanick, neatly hollowed it out. Into it Mr. Biggin generously stuffed the stipulated notes. Now only remained to muster our patience till sun-up.

As the sky began to pale next morning, I presented myself and my cabbage at Covent Garden market. Clearly our man intended to lose himself and his booty in the throng, for this was the moment of the day's most seething activity. I never saw so many people, or so many cabbages. Market carts full of the latter, arriving from every quarter, rattled over the cobbles. Link-boys with burnt-out torches loitered. Bloods bent on mischief prowled: could that be O'Banion I saw rumpling a flower-seller?

For a moment, among the carters and market-gardeners, I thought I saw young Sadler's stone-coloured back; then it was lost in the jostle of basket-women jockeying for the best position. One bent old crone muffled in clouts even had the impudence to jostle *me*: a stray from Billingsgate, by her aroma, for she stank of fish.

As I scowled upon her, a fellow in a dirty red neckcloth whined in my ear: "A penny, yer honour, a penny for the ragamuffin!"

As I turned, cabbage at the ready, a noisome fish basket crashed down over the fellow's head, and down he went in a

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shower of sprats.

The obtrusive old crone, now straight and tall, yanked him to his feet by his greasy neckrag.

"Backis, you scoundrel!" cried Lunardi, putting back his muffling head-cloth. "*Scellerato,* where is my dog?"

"I don't know," muttered the workman. "D-mn you, let me go!"

With a sudden twist he slipped like an eel out of the Italian's grasp and was gone.

"Stop thief!" shouted Lunardi; but he was too impeded by his clouts, I by my cabbage, to have any hope of catching him.

The last I saw of the red neckcloth, a stone-colour coat was after it. We stood a moment looking foolish, and then by mutual consent departed for Bolt Court to break our fast.

At Dr. Johnson's table we sat over a breakfast of rolls and copious draughts of tea. Lunardi, unwound from his trappings, was sunk in gloom. As he toyed with his cup, Frank, the black boy, announced a visitor, and ushered in Mr. Sadler. Provided with a dish of tea, the latter sat back and smiled at me.

"So you lost the fellow, Mr. Boswell."

"How do you know?"

"I was there, sir. For Fidelity's—for the Biggins' sake I resolved to make one at the rendezvous. I saw the fellow in the red neckcloth felled by a basket of sprats, I saw him win free, and I followed him."

"Well done, sir! Whither did he flee?"

"He ran straight to Blanchard's in Pall Mall. He is one of Blanchard's workmen."

"Blanchard!" exclaimed Dr. Johnson. "The rival aeronaut! Signor Lunardi, your course is clear. You must go straight to the Lyceum and spread it about that you will fly on your appointed day, though without Ragamuffin."

"But I will not fly without Ragamuffin."

"Speak as I bid you, and perhaps you need not. If the dog is detained to prevent your flight, as I much fear, then upon your resolution to do without him, the motive to detain him is gone, and he may perhaps be released. Besides, if you do not fly, you bring your courage in question."

"Who questions my courage?" cried Lunardi, starting up with flashing eye. "So be it, then, in fortune's despite I will fly, and I will tell the world of it."

He departed with his head held high.

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"I too must be on my way," said Sadler, "for Miss Fidelity is all concern over Miss Cherry, who grieves alone after Muffin behind a locked door, and shews her face to nobody."

"If she goes on so," I remarked, "she'll starve herself into a decline."

"Starve she will not," replied Sadler, "for when food is left at her door, she takes it in, and licks the dish. So that at least is well. But I must be on my way. I am to seek out a physician for her, who shall give her a medicine to conquer her melancholy. Your servant, gentleman."

As Frank closed the door upon him, Dr. Johnson rose.

"Well, Bozzy, let us be stirring. I'll take the moneyed cabbage to Bunhill Row. You shall go along to Pall Mall and see what Monsieur Blanchard has to say. Be sure to impart to him Signor Lunardi's resolve to fly regardless. Frank shall accompany you. Harkee, Frank, a word in your ear."

Whatever his instructions were, Frank left me in Pall Mall to carry them out, while I engaged Monsieur Blanchard in parley.

The rival aeronaut, as all the world knew, was established at Christie's in Pall Mall, where his "Great Globe and Flying Vessel," rival to Lunardi's, was exposed to publick view. I found him strutting among the gapers, making the most of his gaudily attired five feet of height. He greeted me with a consequential air.

I observed the Frenchman's aerostatick machine with interest. The globe, not so gay as Lunardi's, looked limp. The car, more elaborate, was a sort of triumphal chariot such as gods descend with at the playhouse. But I had not come to gape. At my first question, the Frenchman raised his eyebrows, his hands, and his shoulders, in a vast Gallic shrug.

"Backis? A useful fellow—"

"(who since his discharge brings you Lunardi's secrets)," said I to myself.

"But a dog? What dog? Backis has no dog."

At my explanation, Lunardi's rival was contemptuous.

"*Que diable*!—What the devil, does the Italian fellow rely on his cur to pilot his balloon?"

"No, sir," I said coldly, "for he resolves to fly whether he recovers his pet or not."

Another elaborate shrug: "I have not seen the beast."

No more was to be learned of Blanchard. I took my leave and made my way to report in Bunhill Row.

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Scarce had I made my bow to the family in the withdrawing room, when in came Dr. Johnson, and simultaneously Frank appeared at the servants' door with a word for his ear.

Then hard on Frank's heels came Lunardi, crying: "So, Dr. Johnson, I have done your bidding, but where is Ragamuffin?"

As if upon signal, a rumpus broke out in the wash-house yard, the door panels shook, the latch rattled. Dr. Johnson flung wide the rearward door, and with a scratch and a scramble, Ragamuffin, his leash trailing, tore in and leaped into Lunardi's arms. A sentimental tableau ensued as the little dog eagerly licked his master's Roman nose. Fidelity, much moved, fetched her sister from above stairs, and Charity, weeping openly, embraced the little dog in her turn.

"Now George, with Ragamuffin aboard, we'll fly to the moon!" cried the gratified aeronaut.

Miss Charity stiffened.

"Aboard? But you promised to fly without him!"

"Of course he will fly," said Lunardi.

"I can't bear it! I won't watch! Don't speak to me!"

She stormed up the stair. We heard the door slam, and the key turn in the lock.

"A fit of the vapours," said old Biggin. "She'll come round."

"To work, George!" cried Lunardi, in high spirits. "Time is short, for we must fly to-morrow!"

Immediately efforts were redoubled to be ready for the morrow. From the windows of the house in Bunhill Row, we were able to oversee the proceedings. All along the Row there was a mighty hammering of scaffolding as carpenters knocked together seating for the guinea customers.

Meanwhile, chymist's devils under the direction of Dr. Fordyce swarmed to fill the balloon. The limp empty globe was suspended between two tall poles, and hitched up to a system of kegs and hogsheads, in which by the action of dilute oil of vitriol* on iron filings, the inflammable air was released, and passed into the neck of the balloon. There, being so much lighter than the atmosphere, it would rise to the top, gradually filling the contours of the globe.

As darkness fell, the striped shape, slow in filling, still hung limp. The workmen toiled on. Dr. Johnson retired to repose, but

*sulphuric acid

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the rest of us kept vigil. At midnight Dr. Fordyce came in for a recruit of strong waters and a few winks of sleep, leaving the workmen still feeding the hogsheads. Upon this we all permitted ourselves an interval of rest.

Before dawn, Dr. Fordyce rouzed himself with a snort, settled his wig, and returned to his hogsheads. Curious to see the way of it more closely, I accompanied him. As we approached the balloon, Dr. Fordyce let loose a string of stentorian oaths. Matters were at a standstill. The workmen, we found, were stupefied with drink.

"Being as the young fellow desired us to drink Lunardi's health in a handful of pound notes," one of them half rouzed to mutter.

"A boy, you say?"

"A lad not above five feet high."

"You have been trepanned. Arouze, ye sots, to work!" roared Fordyce furiously.

Operations resumed. Slowly, in the morning light, the striped globe began to fill, as spectators began to gather.

By noon the approaches were crowded, the scaffolding was packed, every window was filled, every rooftop was bestridden by venturesome climbers. Within the wall, the Artillery Ground was filled with a distinguished company. The Prince of Wales, richly attired, centered a knot of sycophants. With amusement I saw Sir Brutus O'Banion with his betting book hovering on the fringes. The beautiful Duchess of Devonshire had chosen to appear *en militaire,* like a soldier in petticoats, with buff coat, cocked hat, and clubbed pigtail. Other ladies of distinction wore their best, ruffles and furbelows and milkmaid hats tipped over their high-piled locks.

In the forefront stood the Biggin family. Young George was clad for the ascent in a rich green riding-coat and a curiously conceited cap of leopard skin. Old Biggin brandished a crutch-handled stick. Miss Fidelity, clad in flame colour, leaned on Mr. Sadler's dark brown sleeve. Only Miss Cherry had not nerved herself to watch, but remained stubbornly silent behind her locked door.

Dr. Johnson, too, in respect of his infirmities, remained in the house, in an armed chair by the window; but I did not bear him company. I had a special point of vantage, on horseback within the wall. With Dr. Sheldon, the ballooning anatomist, I had agreed to ride after the course of the balloon, purposing to be on the spot when it descended.

The throngs outside the wall were growing unruly. Persons of

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quality arriving late in their coaches were stopped dead and pushed back. A pickpocket was caught and hustled. An overcrowded bench gave way with a crack and tipped a row of luckless paying customers to the ground. The crowd seethed and muttered. Remembering the fate of Moret's balloon, and so nearly of Moret himself, I felt a thrill of dread at thought of what might happen if the balloon, still under-inflated, should fail to rise.

Suddenly there was a stir and a murmur as Lunardi appeared, tall and soldierly in scarlet and gold, distributing gracious bows and ravishing smiles. He brought Ragamuffin, bustling with importance, on his leash. Handing the leash to Fidelity, he stepped to inspect his car, now attached beneath the globe. Unlike other aerial cars with their festoons and their gilded crests, his was a strictly workmanlike affair. The square platform was fenced with a balustrade of twisted wire, against which was ranged his cargo.

From my elevated position in the saddle I could see the car plainly. Around the edge were piled the sacks of sand ballast, perhaps a stone's weight in each sack. Someone had already shipped other necessaries for the voyage: a large barometer, a gold-embroidered banner, some viands in a napkin, several bottles of red wine carefully stowed between sacks. The aeronauts' heavy cloaks, against the cold of the upper air, were neatly laid ready over the ballast.

Satisfied that all was in order, the Italian stepped back and looked up at the balloon. It was still a slack pear shape. Bare-armed workmen kept feeding the hogsheads, but the process, thanks to the unknown youth's interference of yesternight, still lagged. The promised moment, one o'clock, passed. The crowd muttered. The rising inflammable air slowly swelled the balloon, but still not enough.

When two o'clock struck from St. Giles steeple, the crowd had worked itself into an ugly mood, ready to wreak revenge on yet another charlatan.

"I cannot wait, I must ascend!" cried Lunardi.

"Will you risk your life?" said old Mr. Biggin.

"I will risk it if I remain on the ground!" said the Italian grimly. "But George shall not. I go up alone."

George started to object; but the resolute Italian shook his head.

"Disconnect the hogsheads! Man the lines!"

The workmen obeyed, and the hero vaulted lightly into the car. Fidelity handed in the black-and-white wriggling shape of

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Ragamuffin. I heard his yips of delight as he frolicked on the floor of the car, nuzzling about.

Lunardi then briskly dropped ballast over the edge, perhaps a dozen sacks. The balloon, though still slightly under-inflated, came into equipoise, and strained on the ropes the workmen held.

"Release the lines! *Avanti*!"

And the balloon went up.

Convinced, as many were, that the venturesome Italian would never be seen again, the Prince of Wales solemnly doffed his gold-laced hat. In a breathless hush all the persons of distinction followed suit, and every face turned upwards.

Then as the red-stripéd globe began to dwindle with distance, the daring aeronaut from his car waved his banner over the side in triumph, and a deep-throated roar of acclaim swept the throng. Even Sir Brutus O'Banion, dear tho' the flight cost him, could not forebear a resounding, if inappropriate *"Erin Go Bragh!"*

Sheldon and I set spur.

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and Lunardi's balloon blew with it. We followed, sometimes at an amble, once in a while at a gallop. We passed through hamlets and by hidden lanes, sometimes baffled by turnings, sometimes turned back at a bag's end, but always we managed to keep the balloon before us in the sky.

In general our way was northward. We recognized Enfield, skirted Epping Forest, made a false start towards Hertford, and at last came up with our quarry in a harvest field near Ware.

The car, uneasily grounded, swayed under the settling globe, From it with frantick gestures the aeronaut was fruitlessly imploring the harvesters to seize the lines. Wary of black magick, they backed off with exclamations of alarm. Then as we cantered near, a farm girl with kilted skirts ran from the brewhouse nearby.

"Is it harvest home?" she cried. Then taking in the situation: "Take shame to yourselves," she scolded, "ye lily-livered louts, why won't ye help the gentleman?"

As she spoke she seized one of the dangling ropes. The men, abashed, followed suit, and the car was brought to rest.

"You, *brava ragazza,*" cried the aeronaut, "what's your name, my good girl?"

"Elizabeth Brett, sir (with a bob)."

"Then, Signorina, receive Ragamuffin, the flying dog."

Handed over and set on his feet, the shagged aeronaut capered

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wildly with delight at touching *terra firma.*

"Now, *carina mia,* rise up, the flight is over."

At this a third passenger came into view from the floor of the car—

Miss Cherry!

White as paper, clad like a boy, she rose shakily to her feet, clinging to the balustrade. Hastily I dismounted to assist, and she too was lifted onto *terra firma.* Three aeronauts had returned safe from the first flight over England.

Wild was the rejoicing, enthusiastick the adulation accorded the daring balloonist. It was some days before he could escape the plaudits of the world and dine *en famille* in Bunhill Row. We were a select company: Mr. Sadler openly holding Miss Fidelity's hand, Lunardi beaming upon them, the elder and the younger Biggin in good frame—and Miss Cherry. The latter had taken heart, and appeared clad in blush colour muslin that matched her mantling cheeks. Dr. Sam: Johnson regarded her with an indulgent smile.

JOHNSON: Well, Miss, you have led us a dance.

BOSWELL: But, sir, if it was Miss who stole away Ragamuffin, what of Backis and his demands?

JOHNSON: Backis, it is clear, saw the notice in the gazettes, and attempted to exploit it for his profit. Through Frank I made sure he never had the dog.

BOSWELL: Yet why would Miss Cherry dog-nap her own beloved pet?

CHERRY (calmly): I feared for his life, in so perilous an ascent.

JOHNSON: The licked dish first told me of the dog's whereabouts; and I soon perswaded Miss to give him up to me. I had only to bring him down the back stair, and set him outside a moment, to keep my promise to Miss to guard her secret until the flight was over. Little did I dream she would make further mischief.

BOSWELL: I marvel how she could hope to hold the dog concealed under our very noses?

CHERRY: I had to try, sir. We had no other place to go. It was a risk, when I threw the note down into the yard; but could I let Vincenzo grieve?

BOSWELL: Yet it was always a boy that cried *Balloon*!, and disappeared with Muffin, and caused the workmen to drink too deep. I made sure it was little Blanchard.

CHERRY: You wrong him. It was I, in Fidelity's masquing gear, for

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she lately went to the masquerade as a link-boy.

BOSWELL: Yet whence came the drink-money you gave?

CHERRY: If you will believe me, sir, out of a cabbage, which I found on my father's writing table!

JOHNSON: Yet, my dear, what was your intent in this second escapade? To fly beside Ragamuffin?

CHERRY: No, sir, somehow to stop the flight, by a slash in the silk, or by severing ropes. But instead of making off to the night-cellar, the men sent for gin and caroused on the spot, while I was forced to lurk in the car. Too soon Dr. Fordyce came roaring, and my chance was lost. From minute to minute, as the day wore on, it was my intent to rise up and throw myself into my brother's arms. Then of a sudden we left the ground, and the moment was past.

JOHNSON: Well, Signor Lunardi, at what moment did you discover your clandestine passenger?

LUNARDI: It was Ragamuffin (fondling the silky ears) who rooted her out from under my cloak, enchanted to find his playmate. But there was no playing. She clasped him to her bosom, and so bravely shared my flight till we descended.

JOHNSON: Give me leave, my dear, to ask you yet two very particular questions. One: how old are you?

The pixie face flashed him a glance.

CHERRY: You are sharp, Dr. Johnson. I am sixteen. But (wryly) I am not to grow up until Fidelity is settled in life. And the second question?

JOHNSON: For what—for whom—did you perform these reckless deeds designed to hinder Signor Lunardi's flight? For a dog? Or a man?

Bright colour stained the small face.

CHERRY: Again you are sharp, sir. Vincenzo was bent upon risking his life. I was bent upon saving it.

"I thank you, Miss," murmured Lunardi, "but you see there was no need."

"Then all is well," remarked Miss Cherry with composure, "and if Fidelity agrees with Sadler—"

"We have agreed," said Fidelity, a-glow, and Sadler pressed her fingers. (A fortnight later, let me add, from Oxford, Sadler, too, successfully mounted in air.)

"—then," continued Miss Cherry calmly, "I become marriageable, and may have Lunardi."

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"No woman," said the aeronaut gently, "may have Lunardi. From henceforth, Lunardi is wedded to his balloon."

"Never mind, my dear," said Dr. Johnson with his complaisant smile, "your fame is assured; in despite of yourself, you have been a passenger in the first aerostatick globe to rise over England!"

AUTHOR'S MEMO TO READERS OF EQMM

The romantic Italian, Vincenzo Lunardi, was the first aeronaut (that was what they called him) to rise in a balloon over Britain, and around him this story is woven. Much of it is true. Lunardi did go aloft with his dog for company, leaving George Biggin disappointed on the ground. The episode of Dr. Fordyce and the drunken workmen is a matter of history, and so is the ride of Dr. Sheldon on the track of the balloon, and the events of Lunardi's descent in the harvest field near Ware.

As to Dr. Sam: Johnson, he was so interested in the development of aerostation that his letters are full of it; he made a contribution to one balloonist (which one we don't know), and presented a barometer to the Oxford aeronaut, James Sadler. When Sadler went up in a hydrogen balloon at Oxford on November 12, 1784, Dr. Johnson was in town, but too unwell to go to see it. Instead, he sent his black boy, Frank, "to see the balloon fly."

Those two wise men, Mr. Horace Walpole and Dr. Sam: Johnson, did express about aerostation the dubieties attributed to them. All Walpole's remarks, including the invention of "Air Mail," come from his letters.

The rest of the tale is embroidery. I have taken the liberty of bringing Johnson and Boswell together in London in September, 1784, when in truth they parted for the last time at Oxford in June. Dr. Johnson died in December, having lived just long enough to see, with the misgivings I have quoted, man's conquest of the skies.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

LITTLE PRESS: Specialist publishers have been with us for centuries. Some publish only religious books, or poetry, or politics—you name it. Mysteriously, there have been virtually no publishers specializing in the most popular form of literature of the 20th century—the mystery. One of the small publishers seeking to fill that void is Oswald Train. In the past, he has published the first American editions of *The Loot of Cities* by Arnold Bennett and *The Adventures of Romney Pringle* by Clifford Ashdown (pseudonym of R. Austin Freeman and J. J. Pitcairn), as well as the first edition in book form of *The Further Adventures of Romney Pringle.* Now, he has released another Ashdown book, the previously unpublished novel, *The Queen's Treasure.* It involves a search for buried treasure and a cryptogram, otherwise has less detection than one might expect. Nevertheless, for Freeman fans (and, presumably Pitcairn fans, though I've never met one), and for those who like adventure tales, it's well worth the $7.50 price. Obtainable directly from Oswald Train, Box 1891, Philadelphia, Penn. 19105.

LITTLE PERIODICAL: We've noted some off-beat magazines in this column, including one devoted to Fu Manchu, one to Sherlock Holmes, and one in Swedish. While we're on the subject of R. Austin Freeman, it seems appropriate to mention a new magazine to gladden the hearts of his fans, and those of his detective, Dr. Thorndyke. The first issue of *The Thorndyke File* has just appeared and it contains, among other goodies, an article by Norman Donaldson, one of the most erudite scholars in the world of mystery fiction. Subscriptions are $5.00 for two issues, obtainable from Philip T. Asdell, R.R. #5, Box 355, Frederick, Md. 21701.

LITTLE NOTES: Dell Shannon has a new Luis Mendoza book at Morrow, tentatively titled *Streets of Death* (scheduled for October). Lesley Egan has just finished a new Jesse Falkenstein book.

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Both names, of course, are pseudonyms for the same writer: Elizabeth Linington. Robert L. Fish is working on the authorized biography of Brazilian soccer star Pele. The complete short stories about his famous rogue, *Kek Huuygens, Smuggler,* is now available from The Mysterious Press, P.O. Box 334, East Station, Yonkers, N.Y. 10704. (The cost is $10 for the regular clothbound edition, $20 for a special collector's edition limited to 250 numbered and signed copies, in a slipcase.)

The Adventures of Willie Sutton, America's favorite bank robber, will soon be published by Viking. It has an advance paperback sale in excess of $100,000. Who said crime doesn't pay?

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Graham Greene's first play in eleven years, the Royal Shakespeare Company's presentation of *The Return of A.J. Raffles,* has received mixed reviews abroad and no American production has yet been set. The character of Raffles (well played by Denholm Elliott) is disturbingly deeply probed, and he is not quite the straight-arrow hero we romantics have come to regard with affection. As well, he is upstaged at times in the second act by another roguish charmer, the Prince of Wales, whose bedroom Raffles has come to burglarize. The thievery is civilized and honorable, and in the end Raffles must suffer a royal rescue.

There is good news for Broadway, however, for in late spring a musical murder comedy called *Something's Afoot* will open after touring to excellent notices for several seasons (breaking house records, for instance, at the venerable Goodspeed Opera House). Written by young authors James McDonald, David Vos, and Robert Gerlach, the play opens in 1935 as ten guests—including spinster busybody Miss Tweed (Tessie O'Shea)—are invited for the weekend to the baronial estate of Lord Dudley Rancour, whose butler suddenly detonates on the stair landing; the deaths thereafter are frequent. Among the songs is a showstopper for Tessie—"I Owe It All to Agatha Christie." The murders all occur *on* stage.

And there's more music on the mystery front. Talented young composer-singer Rupert Holmes (who wrote the enormously innovative *Widescreen* and *Psycho Drama,* and who now works with Barbra Streisand) has—in the song "Brass Knuckles" from his new album called, appropriately

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enough, *Rupert Holmes,* for he does the words, music, arranging and conducting—put together a musical piece that is a complete mystery drama. Long hooked on creating "songs with concepts," Rupert recently went through his *Black Mask* collection and a fifth reading of *The High Window* for inspiration for his tough-cop narrative, which progresses from crime, investigation, suspects, seduction and solution to twist ending—all in 42 lines. It's tight and good right from the first couplet: "Working out of Homicide. They told me Joe Vannelli died./We'd been a team for seven years. His widow wouldn't waste her tears . . ." This "Brass Knuckles" packs a Chandler punch.

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INTERVIEW: WALTER B. GIBSON (THE SHADOW)

Walter B. Gibson is one of the most talented magicians ever to confound an audience. A friend and student of and a ghostwriter for Houdini and Thurston, he has written more than 30 books about magic. But he is even more famous as Maxwell Grant, the creator of the pulp magazine and radio character—The Shadow.

Single-handedly, Gibson wrote 283 novels about The Shadow in the 1930s and 1940s, when each issue of the lurid-covered pulp sold out its printing of 300,000 copies in a few days. No radio program was more familiar than the one inspired by the success of the magazine, and no words were more familiar than Orson Welles asking the weekly rhetorical question, "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?" —then answering it himself with, "The Shadow knows!" followed by a deliciously sinister laugh.

GIBSON: During the 1950s, I couldn't write about The Shadow because the reading public had discovered sex. That is, in mystery and detective fiction. Mickey Spillane had come along and changed the reading tastes of millions of people. The overwhelming popularity of his books spurred the inevitable horde of imitators, and everyone tried to write the same thing. That wasn't for me. The permissiveness of the 1960s, ironically, changed the situation again. After the deluge of sex and violence for two decades, people had had enough. That's not to say there is no interest in that sort of thing; there is. But, now, readers aren't preoccupied with it. They have a wider range of interests.

EQMM: Wouldn't you attribute a substantial portion of the sales of The Shadow books to the nostalgia boom?

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GIBSON: Well, some part. But I believe those who read The Shadow as "camp" are a minority. It's simply a matter of changes in taste. Doc Savage, a great pulp hero who is essentially a science-fiction character, has been revived with enormous success, and there is certainly no nostalgia there. For stories written in the 1930s, science-fiction dealt with a future which, in large part, is *now*. Ten years ago, Doubleday's Crime Club wanted no part of The Shadow and categorically refused to publish anything about him. But they published two novels (in a single volume) this year. The stories didn't change. People's tastes did.

EQMM: Will the popularity of The Shadow endure?

GIBSON: Today, there are more Shadow novels in print than ever before. How long will it last? Only The Shadow knows.

REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

REVENGE, by Noel Hynd. Dial Press, $7.95

Released after having endured 2½ years in a North Vietnamese POW camp, Richard Silva decides to get even with "the Imp"—the European interrogator who tortured him and butchered a number of his fellow prisoners. The ex-Air Force Lieutenant has little chance of ever getting his manhunt off the ground until a group of masked right-wing "patriots" offers to provide him with the necessary information in exchange for an assassination of their own. The realization that he's been a patsy comes far too late for Silva . . . especially after he arrives in Paris where his fate becomes linked somehow with that of the American ambassador's two kidnapped children as well as with the entire French intelligence network. A *Death Wish*-ful vehicle, involving up to a point, and destined for the wide screen.—*Kirkus Reviews*

HIGH STAKES, by Dick Francis. Harper & Row, $7.95

All the skill that has made Dick Francis one of the world's most popular and acclaimed suspense writers makes his latest novel of foul play and deception in the fast-moving world of thoroughbred racing a sure-fire winner.

"HIGH STAKES is as full of sudden and unexpected hazards as a first-class steeplechase. It is an armchair gallop of grand national proportions."—Heywood Hale Broun

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

STRAIGHT, by Steve Knickmeyer. Random House, $6.95

Did Tracy Zantell's lover commit suicide, as everyone in Solano, Oklahoma believes, or was he murdered? And what is a guy like Richard Straight, an ex-New York cop who reads Kierkegaard, listens to Tchaikovsky, and drinks boiled water, doing hanging around a dull middle-American town? Two likable and very unalike private investigators, an interesting assortment of believable characters (including a cat that opens bathroom doors), and a plot that keeps you guessing to the very end distinguish this tough, sardonic, excellent crime novel. "A good and gamy first novel with lots of offbeat action."—*Kirkus Reviews*

911, by Thomas Chastain. Mason/Charter, $7.95

Tension mounts quickly in this new suspense novel as first a Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade balloon bursts into flames, and next a bomb is planted in Radio City Music Hall. Then a policeman's body is ripped in half by another bomb. Deputy Chief Inspector Max Kauffman must race against time to stop the psychopathic bomber.

911 is a novel of "terrifying immediacy and realism.... What really makes this work so intelligent, however, is the background expertise Chastain has brought to it in terms of the psychology behind such bombings and in the way in which bomb detectives actually work."—*Publishers Weekly*

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THE POE-TIC CORNER

DETECTIVERSE

IN MEMORIAM

A Tribute to Hercule Poirot

by MARJORIE Q. BOYLE

Although my eyes are definitely misty
I'm in accord with Agatha Christie
And think that she was very wise
To perpetrate Poirot's demise.
If left to the whims of writers-to-come,
Hercule's future might well have been glum.
Indeed, it would be ridiculous
For a character so meticulous,
While cogitating over clues,
To appear in a pair of unpolished shoes
Or possibly to be denied
His chocolate, or be dissatisfied
If tonsorial artists lacked the right touch
On the mustache that Poirot prized so much.
Perhaps there will be some celestial crimes
For our brilliant egghead to solve sometimes.
If not, let's hope that he'll find enjoyment
In collecting celestial unemployment!

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THE POE-TIC CORNER

DETECTIVERSE

HERDUNIT

by R. C. SHEBELSKI

There is growing concern in the press
That more crooks are now wearing a dress.
Women's Lib may well say,
"Equal crime, equal pay,"
But no cop should say *perpetratess*.

DUTY-BLIND

As the sergeant explained to his spouse,
"Private eyes couldn't capture a mouse.
It's us guys on patrol,
Watching guys on parole,"
Never seeing what ran out of the house.

THE LEAK BUZZED

"One could say," said the fly, "I'd been mugged
From the way I was set up and slugged.
The cop knocked me out cold
Just as if he'd been told
That his ear was about to be bugged."

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a *NEW* Chick Kelly story by

S. S. RAFFERTY

Chick's back—Chick the Cute Cut-Up whose address is Chicksville, The Big Apple, N.Y., U.S.A. Chick the Comic whose stand-up act couldn't get a split week in Hoboken these hard showbiz days. Chick the swinger making like a swain, with a big bouquet of mums in his mitt, and falling right into a murder scene and becoming the Indignant if Reluctant Detective . . . Buzz 'em, Chick!

BUZZ 'EM, CHICK!

by S. S. RAFFERTY

I did a slow burn when she buzzed the vestibule door release without asking who it was over the intercom. Sure, she was expecting me around 8:00 P.M., but does that mean muggers don't work those hours too? I would have to read the Honey Bear waiting up in 4C the riot act on protecting herself, but not tonight. This was really my second shot at Kelly Regan, and I didn't want to mess it up with a "papa scold" bit.

Intriguing, isn't it? Since my name's Chick Kelly, she would be Kelly Kelly if we ever went the orange-blossom route. At the moment, however, I was carrying mums, big yellow ones, a three-dozen bouquet to go with her yellow hair.

As I started up the stairway to paradise lugging the horticulture, I thought back that I almost never got to make the trip. I first met Kelly Regan a month ago when she was with a party at my night club on Third Avenue. I got real sting-y over her, but there was no feedback. I was crushed, desolated. For a full ten, maybe fifteen minutes, I go through the pangs of rejection. You can't win 'em all, but there are some you hate to lose.

As luck would have it, sometimes you get a rematch. I did when I bumped into her at one of Christy Blake's boozethons. I don't know what I did wrong the first time we met, but I must have

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overcome the deficiency, because Kelly now thinks I'm Mr. Magnificent. The truth shall prevail.

Now, most ladies in this town insist on being treated like visiting royalty on the first couple of dates. (My ex-wife #2 makes a life-long profession out of it; Queen Maxine is now in exile in New Jersey living on the spoils of my domain.)

But not my new babycakes. "Look, Chick," she says through angel lips, "you live in night clubs, restaurants, and cocktail parties. I'll bet you haven't had a home-cooked meal in years."

"It's against the law to cook in apartments in New York City. Everyone knows that."

"Seriously, Chick, I'm a good cook, so let me show off, will you?"

So how can you argue with that? I'm all aglow because somebody wants to do something for *me*. It's a new sensation that I don't want to miss. However, I should have kept my mouth shut at the club. The thought of their leader falling into domesticity petrifies my staff.

"Go to Vegas for a week until it blows over," Jack McCarthy, my kitchen manager, advises.

"Till what blows over?"

"The fireside-and-slippers feeling. It's fatal for a guy like you."

"I don't know if she has a fireplace, and I don't own slippers. Stop over-reacting." But he kept on over-reacting, and so did Guido LaSalle, my head chef.

"She cooks for *you*? Only *I* cook for you, Chick. All right, I understand your need for *amour*, but not with a woman who wears an apron. Don't you know women sweat when they work over a stove? I shall come with you and make the dinner. Gigot de Présalé Farce or Fricadelles de Veau à la Nicoise. Yes, the Fricadelles, but with fresh ratatouille. No tomatoes and onions."

This is more than over-reacting. It's insanity. All Guido ever cooks for me is steak and eggs, but that's not his fault. That's all I eat. I give him a thanks and a negative, and then Sylvia Kantrowitz gets into the act. Sylvia is the wife of my partner, Barry Kantrowitz. Barry was my agent when I was on the road as a comic. Sylvia is my surrogate mother, sometimes friend, and constant pain in the neck.

"Now that sounds like the type of girl you should get to know better, Chick darling," she says on the phone. The way the news is spreading, I'm beginning to feel like the ugly wallflower who got asked to the prom by mistake.

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"Better a girl who is willing to make a home for you than some of those tramps you run around with."

"Sylvia, she's only making dinner, for crying out loud."

"And who else ever offered? Maybe that actress Jumpers, maybe? She couldn't open up an Oreo cookie."

"Jeepers, not Jumpers."

"I say if the shoe fits. Maybe that dancer—I'm being kind calling her that—maybe she could whip you up a banquet in her hotel room? Who would live in a hotel room, I ask you? I'll tell you"—of course she would—"tramps, people without homes, girls who take their clothes off to music."

"Sylvia, I'm just having dinner, so what's the problem?"

"No problem. I just called to tell you how to treat a nice girl. Don't bring a bottle of wine, bring flowers. Lots of flowers, and, Chick, you be respectful."

So here I was respectfully climbing the stairs thinking I should have worn knickers and parted my hair in the middle. The swain was coming to call. But I had to admit the Andy Hardy role was a change of pace.

When I get to her door, I decide to get cute. I step to the side of the doorway and hold the bouquet out in front of the door with one hand. This way, when she opens it, all she sees is a bunch of flowers. Okay, it's corny, but who said Andy Hardy was sophisticated? Chick the Cute Cut-Up.

So I press the door buzzer and wait to spring the surprise. I get one instead. The bullet was going at a good clip when it zinged through the door, grazed my thumb knuckle, and went merrily on its way down the hall.

If this was a welcome, it was as close to a goodbye as you can get. I froze against the wall, letting the flowers fall in a blood-speckled heap where I would have been standing before the door. I heard a door open and I shouted, "Get back inside and call the police! Tell them a person is firing a deadly weapon!"

That's the quickest way to get a cop—*all* the cops. There was an apartment door marked 4D on an angle from where I stood, but I'd have to cross the line of fire to get to it, which I wasn't about to do. But then I had to, because the door of 4D swung open and a dumb broad came rushing out into danger. I made a fast leap, got her around the waist, and tumbled her back in. I'm no hero, folks, but the girl about to expose herself to the line of fire was Kelly Regan.

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I had knocked the wind out of her, and she looked a little pale. I could hear sirens on the street and went to the window cautiously, not knowing if 4C was connected by the fire escape on the front side of the building. It wasn't. I shouted down to the cops that the guy was armed.

"What's the location?" a helmeted bull calls up. What am I, an architect?

"How the hell do I know? It's 4C and it's blind to the street, so it must front on the alley."

I turned from the window and checked Kelly on the floor. Her color was coming back, but her breathing was still shallow. I was also doing a bang-up job of getting blood all over the rug. I spotted the bathroom at the end of a short hall that led back to the bedroom.

Why they are called medicine cabinets, I'll never know. Makeup cabinets, okay. Shaving-gear lockers, maybe, but not *medicine* cabinets. Kelly Regan went it one better. She had a nothing cabinet. Empty.

I like Spartan women. I was also happy not to find *two* safety razors. Two of them means you've got competition. None means the lady uses a depilatory.

I'm some first-aid expert. Here I'm slowly bleeding to death and a girl is lying in shock on the living-room floor and all I can do is analyze the social significance of medicine cabinets. I closed the cabinet door and almost swallowed my tongue. In the mirror was the reflection of what looked like a Martian. He was saying, "Freeze, Mister." I froze. I always do in the presence of an automatic weapon.

"Clasp your hands on top of your head and turn around slowly," the Martian said. He was standing just inside the front door and had me smack in his sights. With the brutal-looking weapon he had in his hands, he could have hit me if I was standing down in Battery Park.

"Who are you, Mister?" he barks.

The blood from my hand was getting into my hair and started to run down my forehead. "I'm Alphonse, King of Spain. You'll note I'm a hemophiliac." My Martian was in even better view now. He was a Tactical Squad cop, all decked out in bulletproof vest and pants and a helmet with a face visor.

"She dead?" He cocked his head at Kelly's unconscious form.

"Look, officer, the shooting was next door in 4C. I got plinked

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through the door, and when that lady opened her door—4D—I knocked her down to keep her out of the line of fire."

He told me to come out of the john "slow" and started giving Kelly quick pats on the cheek. She groaned and blinked and was sitting up in a few seconds delivering the classic line "What happened?"

"Chick, your head is bleeding," she said, getting to her feet.

"No, honey, my hand is bleeding, and the Lone Ranger here won't let me put my arms down. What's for dinner?"

"Let's see that hand, buddy." Now I'm his buddy. I showed him. "Just a flesh wound," he reported. "Go put a towel around it." Her he gives first aid, me he sends to the showers.

When I came back from the john, Kelly was answering all kinds of pertinent questions.

The apartment next door—4C—was occupied by a girl named Buffy Roob. She's single, lives alone, and is a friend and former school chum of Kelly's. As it turned out, the whole building was loaded with former collegemates. It was a transplanted Tri Delt house.

"You say you got hit by a bullet coming through the door of 4C?" the cop asked after reporting to someone down below over his walkie-talkie.

"I didn't just *say* it, I *was* hit. You want to go through the bloody-hand number again?"

"Stay cool, pal, I'm not a detective. If a bullet came through that metal door, it had to be a Super-Vel, and that's bad." He made another report on the box. I must have looked dumb, because after the report he gave a five-minute lecture on ballistics, ending up with. "Super-Vel, a steel-jacketed round. Does the Roob woman keep a weapon, Miss Regan?"

Kelly told him she didn't think so.

"How about boy friends or ex-boy friends? You know, drinkers or droppers."

"Oh, my God, why don't you stop asking questions and go in there? Buffy could be held at gunpoint."

"That's why we're taking it slow and easy. If someone is holding her in there as a hostage, we want to make sure we get her out alive."

I've made cracks about cops but now I have to rescind them because in the next half hour I saw and heard a bunch of cops tackle a problem with skill and guts. Over our Martian's walkie-

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talkie we followed the step-by-step procedure of outflanking and flushing a nut sniper.

Buffy Roob's apartment did face the side alley, and police had been positioned on the fire escape below and above it, and on the roof of the building opposite. A bullhorn poured out a lot of simple psychology which shows you how far we've come from the old Jimmy Cagney films: "Ya got five minutes, killer, and then we blast ya" had been replaced with "No problem is that big. We can help you if you'll let us. No one will hurt you." Then we got little reports on the Siege Broadcasting Network like: "Position Four. No one moving around in there, but we only have about forty percent in view. Floor plan shows two blind spots if you go in through the front door."

Floor plans! These dudes are organized, friends.

"You don't know if the door was unlocked, do you?" Our friend the Martian now had a name, Officer Tom Aceto, and he had learned his trade in Vietnam.

"I just rang the doorbell," I told him.

"Buffy doesn't lock the door during the early evening," Kelly told us. "All the girls are in and out of each other's places all the time."

"Were you in there today, Miss?"

"Yes, around six, when I got home from the office. She was alone then."

"Was she acting okay?"

"Certainly she was okay. You don't think Buffy has gone berserk with a gun, do you? She's just not the type."

Aceto shrugged. It was a gesture she didn't understand, but I did. There ain't no such thing as a type.

We had been at this game for two hours, and yet it seemed like just a few minutes. Time goes fast when you're facing a disaster. Around 10:30 the police brass down on the street decided to move. Another Tactical cop came crawling in on his belly, and he and Aceto go into a conference. Then they went out into the hall and positioned themselves both sides of Buffy's door. The attack hour must have been 10:45, because that's when they moved in, and that's when the sound of window smashing started.

It was all over in seconds. The door to 4C wasn't locked, and Aceto and company were in like a flash. I could hear the crackle of the walkie-talkies rebounding off the prowl-car radios below. "Point zero secured. No one but a woman. She's dead."

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Buffy Roob's body was in a heap just inside the front door. There was a bullet hole in the back of her head. Kelly Regan went into the fainting act again, but this time another Tri Delt named Bobo Howard came down from upstairs and played big sister.

Along with the 106 cops that were swarming all over the place was one who stood out because of his shiny bullethead. Of course, it was my Big Brother (totalitarian, not fraternal), Lieutenant Donald Jaffee of Homicide. Jaffee was born a couple of centuries too late. He would have been terrific during the Inquisition. He has two driving forces inside him: to make Captain, and to see my body aging away in the slammer. Good luck, Bullethead.

An ambulance doctor bandaged my hand, which was the first thing I ever got free from the City of New York.

"You shouldn't be drinking," he told me. "It impedes clotting."

"Doc, after tonight, I'm going to stay drunk for a month. She commit suicide?"

"Doesn't look it from the angle of the shot. Back of the head. The M.E.'s in there now."

"Dammit, Doctor," a voice bellowed from the outer hall doorway. "Who told you to bandage his hand?" Jaffee came in with a stamp and a snort. "I wanted paraffin lifts off that hand."

Here we go, boys and girls. It's Torquemada time again. The doctor gave him a nasty answer about only doing his job, and Jaffee ignored him. "You rang her doorbell at eight o'clock?"

"A little before, maybe 7:55 or so. You're looking quite fit, Lieutenant."

"Don't start with the mouth, Kelly. How long have you known Miss Roob?"

"Never had the pleasure. You're not seriously trying to rope me into this mess, are you, Jaffee?"

"Coogan, give him the Miranda."

Coogan is Jaffee's dog-robber and a fat dope. Coffee he could get for you, papers he could file for you, but that's his limit. He reads me my rights like he's Laurence Olivier who got lost in the jungles of Brooklyn and went native.

". . . and you have da right to consult an attoiney," he brought the soliloquy to its merciful end.

"I don't need an attorney, Coogan, because, along with being a hemophiliac, I have just contracted St. Zachary's disease."

He gave me a funny look and edged away.

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"You'd better brush up on your hagiology, Coogan. Old Zack is the patron saint of all us mutes. Stick around and listen to the silence."

"Look, funnyman," Jaffee's oar was back in. "Let me give you some facts. The doc thinks your girl friend is pregnant, maybe two months. Maybe you came up here earlier, like 7:45, shot her in the head at an angle that would put a steel-jacketed bullet through her skull and on out through the door. Then you cut your finger on purpose, go out in the hall, and go through an act. You only made one little mistake. You forgot to push the spring lock so the door would lock behind you."

"That's terrific, Daddy. Now why can't you tell us the one about the three bears and Goldilocks? That's my favorite."

"Keep laughing it up, Kelly—and who are you?" My Honey Bear was coming out of her bedroom. "I was talking to this gentleman, ma'am?" Jaffee changed his tone of voice.

"Oh, yes, of course. I'm sorry, my name's Kelly too."

Folks, it was beautiful. Jaffee looked like an ape that had just bit into a rubber banana. "She's your wife? You're married?"

"Well, you know how it is, Lieutenant," I said. "It was a small ceremony. Just intimate friends and family. Don't feel slighted."

"You are with the police?" she asked. "I'm Kelly Regan. I live here—in 4D."

Jaffee muttered, "I'll be damned."

"Kelly, would you tell this man that I was supposed to have dinner with you and I rang the wrong doorbell?"

"Well, certainly you were, Chick. They don't think you had anything to do with it, do they?"

"Honey Bear, where Lieutenant Jaffee is concerned, I am responsible for the second World War. Jaffee, I never laid eyes on the dead woman in my entire life."

"That's not true, Chick," Kelly said, to my surprise. "I mean, you had seen her. She was with our crowd at your club last month. I don't want them to trap you into something."

Thank the Lord for a protective woman.

"Okay, so I laid eyes on her. Period. Did you know she was pregnant, Honey Bear?"

Jaffee did a fume. "Dammit, Kelly, shut up. A few minutes ago, you were giving us this St. Zachary routine—"

"I'm cured. I've taken my business to St. Amos. He handles blabbermouths."

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"Buffy pregnant?" Kelly gave us an astonished look. "That's a lie."

"No, it's not, Kel," Bobo Howard said from the bedroom door. "She was sure of it on the fifteenth. She told me last night."

It dawns on me that in all the confusion I didn't tell you what Kelly Regan looks like, but then, I call her Honey Bear, so you know she's blonde and cuddly. Bobo Howard was another matter. She was tall, I mean treetop tall, but by no means skinny. She wasn't beautiful, but her face was one of those crazy combinations of angles that change as her head turns from one lighting to another. This baby was a cinematographer's dream. If you have deduced that I was changing ladies in midstream, you're wrong. I am not fickle, just appreciative.

"Did she know who the father was, Miss Howard?" Jaffee asked, and got a blast from Kelly Regan.

"That's raw, Lieutenant, postively raw!"

"Look, Miss, there's been a murder committed, and I'm going to have to ask a lot of embarrassing questions. I don't take cheap shots for the fun of it. Maybe I should have asked: did she *say* who the father was?"

Both women looked at each other for a moment. "No," Bobo answered, "she didn't say."

"You were her best friend, Miss Howard?"

"We were all friends. We all went to Syracuse together. There are six of us sorority sisters in the building."

"Miss Howard." Jaffee took a deep breath. "I'm sorry, but I don't believe you. A woman just doesn't tell a friend she's pregnant. She talks about her plans, her lover—"

"When was the last time you were pregnant?" Bobo zinged him. Okay, I am fickle. This is a dynamite broad.

"We'll leave the sarcasm to Mr. Kelly here," Jaffee went on. "He's the expert at it. Ladies, if she had a steady boy friend, it will be easily found out, so why not cooperate?"

"Larry Crone." Kelly whispered it almost to herself.

"Who's that?"

"Langdon Crone, Lieutenant," Bobo said loud and clear.

"The football player?" Coogan made a contribution.

"The stockbroker. Larry hasn't been on a football field since we all graduated three years ago." While Bobo was talking, a plainclothes guy came in and whispered something to Coogan who in turn whispered something to Jaffee. It couldn't have been any-

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thing important like the building was on fire, because the Lieutenant just filed the information in the back of his dome and drove through with a truckload of questions.

I don't want to make Jaffee appear clever, so I'll summarize. Grudgingly, I'll admit that he's good at his job, but I'm not going to play press agent for the cluck.

Langdon Crone was God's gift to the gridiron and girls. Neither Bobo nor Kelly could swear that he was stuck on any one woman, although they did admit he had seen a lot of Buffy Roob in the last few months. But that was no big deal, because he had dated half of the women on the eastern seaboard at one time or another, including Kelly and Bobo. Jaffee is chugging on with the interrogation, then he hurls a slider.

"You live in this building, Miss Howard?"

"Yes, upstairs, in 5C."

"That's directly over Miss Roob's apartment."

"Yes." She frowned.

"Which means you share the fire escape on that side of the building."

"Bobo." Kelly touched her friend's arm. "Don't say another word until I call my father."

"Why, for God's sake?" Bobo was indignant.

"Don't you see what he's implying? That you could have come down the fire escape and—"

"That's ridiculous. Why would I want to kill Buffy? Are you charging me with homicide, Lieutenant?"

"I'm not charging anyone yet, Miss Howard."

"Oh, then, if that's the case," I said, "I'll be running along." I started for the door.

"You stay right here, Kelly, and stop clowning. Miss Howard, I was merely pointing out that you had opportunity. Nothing more. Did you hear the shot?"

"Yes, I did, and I was petrified."

"Did you go to the window?"

"No. Why should I?"

"Most people do. Gunshots sound like backfires. Yes, Morgan?" He turned to another cop in a Bond suit who was walking in with a redhead in tow.

"She just got here, Lieutenant."

"Oh, Bobo. They told me about poor Buffy." The redhead broke away from the bull and was sobbing in big sister's arms.

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"Kippy, try to control yourself," Bobo said sternly. "Tears won't help."

When I said that this was Tri Delt House, New York Chapter, I forgot to comment on the names. Kippy's entrance tore it as far as I was concerned. Why blueblooded girls always have names like Kippy and Bobo and Buffy is as big a mystery to me as their Locust Valley accents. In New York it's called L.V. lockjaw. Everyone who has ever been to a debutante ball has to talk through their clenched teeth with a quasi-English touch. Every one of them walks around sounding like Franklin D. Roosevelt. With the women I can take them one at a time, but three of them filling the air with broad A's was excruciating. Come to think of it, my ex-wife #2 talks that way too. Maybe that's where we went wrong. Well, back to the ball game.

Kippy Worth is in the lineup because she lives in 3C, directly below the dead girl's apartment. If Bobo could go *down* the fire escape, little sobbing Kippy could have made the trip *up* the same way. Jaffee was sure heavy with opportunity leads. My hand was starting to throb, so I poured another drink and asked the ladies if they cared for any.

"What are you doing, starting a cocktail party?" Jaffee was snarling again.

Kelly said she'd like a vermouth, Kippy didn't want anything, and Bobo ordered bourbon neat. Now, this is my kind of blueblooded broad.

Kippy told Jaffe that she went out to pick up some groceries about ten to seven. If she had, she must have been able to cloud men's minds, because I didn't see her when I came in from the street about that time. Sure, I kept my mouth shut. I don't own a badge.

While Jaffee is working on Kippy Worth, digging for a motive, in it walks. If you have a drum handy, give Langdon Crone a couple of ruffles. Here come da prince, here come da prince!

Personally, I would have expected a former star halfback to be bigger, but then I'm used to the behemoths who play pro ball. If you want an honest, straight-from-the-hip read-out, I'll have to say that I am better looking. Not that he looks like chopped liver, mind you. I can understand that he might have had a certain following among the ladies, but he had no depth of field. He, too, had the Roosevelt syndrome, and he told Jaffee his story like it was a Fireside Chat. He was hanging himself in broad A tones.

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"I'm here because I told Buffy I would either call or come by around midnight. Yes, Lieutenant, I knew she was bearing my child. I'm sorry, Kippy, I should have told you. What could I do, darling? She said she was on the pill, and I believed her. Well, I had to do the right thing, didn't I? She threatened to go to your father, Kelly. That would be the end of me at Regan, Tilson & Chaney and the end of me on Wall Street. She said she had to have my answer tonight, so I wandered around weighing it in my mind."

"Where were you wandering around around eight o'clock, Mr. Crone?" Jaffee wanted to know.

"I don't know. I was sitting in Central Park for a while. Is that when it happened? Eight o'clock? I guess I was in the park."

On top of being a dodo, Langdon had the brains of a five year old, or else he is Superman. You don't just wander around Central Park after sunset unless you're in the muggers' union. Even then, you're not safe, because like sharks, the Bad Persons of this world prey on each other.

I could see that Jaffee was putting the polish on his fire-escape theory. As Jaffee saw the case, it was obvious that Larry-boy didn't want to marry the burgeoning madonna, but if he wanted to kill her, he should have invited her to the park. Instead, he comes up the fire escape, gives it to Bountiful Buffy, and scoots.

What makes me angry is that the jerk almost killed me in the bargain. I'm thinking Larry is dumb enough to still be carrying the gun when Coogan walks in with a .38 iron and Jaffee asks everybody if they have ever seen the thing before. He got five "no's," including mine. So the killer had left the gun behind him.

I could see we were going to play fingers in the ink, and I was hoping we would do it there, but Jaffee had other ideas. Every time a cop gets an idea, he says, "Let's go downtown." It must be the crummy coffee they have at Headquarters, or the feeling of security they get. It certainly isn't the ambience.

If Jaffe had any idea of keeping us downtown all night, he didn't know Kelly Regan's papa. Old Mike Regan didn't get to be head of Regan, Tilson & Chaney by being Mr. Nice Guy. He storms into Headquarters dropping a power number that would cow Mao Tse-tung. Not one lawyer friend, not two, but count 'em—three legal types and a Superior Court judge he collected along the way. If you're going to play rough, Mike Regan can teach you the ropes.

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It was enjoyable to see Jaffee take the count and set us loose. I just kept my mouth shut and moved with the crowd.

An army of newsguys had followed us down to Headquarters and were camped all over the place. Before we went into the corridor, old man Regan hands out the marching orders.

"Kelly, Kippy, and Bobo ride in the Judge's car. Larry, you ride with me. The only way we're going to avoid these newspeople is to go out to Long Island and barricade ourselves in."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Regan," Bobo objected. "I'm going home."

Regan gave her a concerned look. "I really think you should come with us, Bobo. This is a very serious matter, and you're all involved. Now, the lawyers can work with you all tonight, and we can have a cohesive picture ready for the District Attorney in the morning."

Bobo gave him back the concerned look, but she put some backhand on it. "I'm not sure what a 'cohesive picture' is, Mr. Regan, and I don't think I want or need to be part of one."

"Bo darling, Daddy's right." Kelly had taken her arm. "Besides, these damn media people will haunt you all night."

Then she floored me. Bobo, that is. "I'm sure Chick Kelly can handle that problem," she told them. (Give me a few bars of *Falling in Love ta da,* please.)

They all had a five-minute argument which ended with Mike Regan shrugging and heading his mob out into the glare of flashbulbs. When the door closed behind them, I said to Bobo, "Smart move. They'll draw the newsguys with them, so if we wait a few minutes we can stroll out of here."

It was almost 2:30 in the morning, and I suggested that we stop off at the club for some chow. Bobo sat back in the cab seat and laughed out loud. Big Sister had put up a good front, but she was coming apart fast.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'm not really hysterical. It's just that, you poor guy, you never did get dinner. Do you like frittata?"

"Italian omelets? Sure."

"Well, I'll make you one with zucchini and garlic, if you can stand it."

"Garlic is good for my blood. I lost a little tonight."

"We all lost a little tonight," she said and then she joined St. Zachary for the rest of the trip uptown to the Tri Delt house.

Around 3:30 I was into a scene nobody would believe. I was sitting on a kitchen stool watching her grate zucchini and break

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eggs. No fireside, no slippers, mind you, but just the right touch of domesticity.

"How did you ever get mixed up with Kelly Regan?" she asked as she whacked garlic cloves into a mince.

" 'Mixed up' makes her sound like one of the seven sins."

"You know what I mean. Come on, Chick, I've heard about you. You're not her type and she's not yours."

"I don't know. Opposites attract, maybe. Poor little rich girl meets comedian."

"You really don't know her very well, do you? I'll bet you think all of us have nothing jobs and get support checks from home every week. Well, we're not. I'm a bacteriologist, Kippy is a graphics designer, and Kelly, believe it or not, is on her way to becoming a licensed architect."

"So?"

"So I just had a feeling you thought we were all a bunch of dumb bunnies biding our time before we started hatching a brood of future Harvard or Smith graduates."

"What did Buffy Roob do?"

"Score one for your side. Nothing. She was a fine arts major, but she couldn't paint worth a damn. Her father is in California real estate. Oh, God, I just thought. Has anyone called her family?"

"The cops take care of that, and I'm sure Mike Regan will see to it."

"I can't stand him and he knows it. He treats us all like lame brains. He's our 'New York Daddy.' Our protector. You know what he calls us? His Swell Girls Club."

"Two things, baby—"

"Don't call me baby, Chick, please?"

"Yeah. I caught the lib tempo, but quite frankly, I can't see much difference in 'Bobo.' "

"It's Barbara."

"Swell . . . Barbara . . . two things. Did Buffy tell you that Larry Crone was the father of her child, and did she tell anyone else?"

"No. Two times no, although she obviously did tell Larry."

"Were you ever in love with him, Barbara?"

She looked up from the chopping board and gave me as straight a look as I'll ever get. "Bed, yes. Love, no. You're getting to sound like Lieutenant Jaffee."

"He's just doing his job. Me, I've got a personal stake in this."

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"I don't see how. You didn't know Buffy or anyone, for that matter, except Kelly Regan, and you don't seem to know her very well, either."

I lifted up my bandanged paw. "You're forgetting this. If I hadn't been playing Andy Hardy with the flowers, I might be in a box surrounded by them right now. That makes me indignant."

She chuckled. "The Indignant Detective. That's very dramatic motivation."

"Aces. Look, Jaffee has three prime suspects: Larry Crone, Kippy Worth, and you. Now, ladies that make guys frittata at three in the morning don't kill people. That's fiat. From the way Larry was apologizing to Kippy, it looks like those two have had their moments."

"She was in love with him, but she wouldn't kill Buffy. They were roommates."

"Husbands kill wives and vice versa and they're roommates. But it's so dumb. If Kippy was insanely jealous, she would walk in, blast Buffy, and be done with it. At least she could cop a plea on temporary insanity. This thing was planned, and the murderer hoped to get away with it. That makes Larry look a little stupid. If he planned to knock her off, he'd have built a better alibi than that sitting-in-the-park bit."

"Which brings it down to me."

"Jaffee tossed a low one at you when he asked if you went to the window when you heard the shot. Did you look out?"

"No. I said no." The look was furtive, but the voice firm.

"To Jaffee. How about to me?"

"I don't know what you're driving at, Chick. I really don't."

"Let me put it this way, Barbara. I'm a comedian by trade. Do you know what comedy is? It's the mutual suspension of logic and reality. I know I can tell you a story about a dog that smokes cigars and reads books, and you'll laugh because you're willing to accept the illogical premise of the dog's activity for the sake of the humorous point I'll make.

"I'm doing the same thing here. I'm tossing out logic and going off on all sorts of tangents. For instance, let's say you did look out the window and saw something or someone."

"I didn't, but who could I have seen in your illogical meandering?"

"Lots of people. People who aren't even in the case. A burglar."

"Nothing was taken, remember? I went over the apartment

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with Lieutenant Jaffe. And he said it was unlikely that a burglar would have a gun, and even if he did, he surely wouldn't leave it behind."

"Check. The gun's sterile, untraceable. Well, who else could you have seen? Mike Regan, maybe."

"That's not comedy, that's insanity. Why in heaven's name would he want to kill Buffy Roob?"

"To protect the name of one of his firm's bright lights from a paternity suit. A well-known college athlete can sell a lot of stocks and bonds. Maybe Buffy wasn't pregnant by Larry at all. Maybe old Mike himself—"

"Chick, that's disgusting!"

"So's murder. Try this one on. Let's say Kelly Regan is nuts over Larry, and her papa puts Buffy out of the way to keep his little girl happy."

"Kippy seems to be the one he loves."

"The Regan money could ace Kippy out, but not Buffy—not a mother-to-be. Maybe Buffy stayed off the pill to trap Crone. He's the noble type, isn't he?"

"Definitely," she said, then pointed to my bandaged mitt. "You're dripping again. Come on, I'll put a fresh dressing on it."

How do you like them apples? A cook, a big sister, a bacteriologist, and a nurse. She drags me into the bathroom and does the mercy number, and is very professional about it. When she opened her medicine cabinet, I spotted one lone safety razor. Good girl.

"You're not serious about suspecting Mike Regan, are you?" She was putting the finishing touches on my new bandage. "I don't like his paternalism, but believe me, Chick, he's not the type."

"That's the second time I've heard that 'type' business tonight. You know, I'm only using my brain power on this for selfish reasons. Tomorrow morning Regan and company are going to tie this thing into legal knots, then Jaffee is going to start looking for a fall guy. Guess who? I'm ninety percent sure he can't make it stick, but he can put sand in my gears for weeks. Maybe the thing never gets solved, and I walk around under a cloud for years. One-time suspects are all-time suspects. How did you all come to be living in the same building?"

"Mike Regan owns it. What does that do, put another nail in his coffin?"

"It might get him off my hook. This is an old building, isn't it?"

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She nodded. "Complete with bad plumbing, old-fashioned kitchens, and practically no closet space. But we can't complain, because the rent is dirt cheap. Swell Girls Club, remember?"

"You just gave me a very large idea, Barbara. Your apartment's an exact duplicate of Buffy's down below, isn't it?"

"Yes. So?"

"So I'm going down there."

"That's breaking and entering."

"The sun isn't up yet, so it's questionable burgling. But I say questionable because I don't intend to commit a felony."

"What do you hope to prove down there, Chick?"

"I don't know. Or I know and I don't want to think about it. Come on, Barbara."

There was no cop doing guard duty outside Buffy's door when we'd come in earlier, so I assumed we could move around without interruption. We went down the fire escape and I forced the window and helped my accomplice into the scene of the crime. Barbara had given me a penlight, and I started prowling around Buffy's living room. On the floor three feet from the front door was the chalk outline of where Buffy had fallen. To the right, near the bathroom door, was an outline of where the weapon had landed.

"Where are you going, Chick?" Barbara whispered.

"To the john."

"Now? For heaven's sake."

"No, come on." I took her hand, which was cold, and led her into the bathroom and closed the door. I turned on the light, since the room had no window and there was nothing to give us away if the cops were watching down on the street.

"Why are we closeted in a john, Chick?"

"Closeted—good girl. You're catching on." I opened the medicine cabinet and smiled. "See? It's empty."

"So what?"

"So *your* medicine cabinet is jammed with makeup and first-aid stuff."

"I told you, this building has practically no closet space."

"Sure, so you use every inch of storage space you have. So why not Buffy?"

"Wait a minute, she did keep things in there once. I remember getting some aspirin from it last week."

"Good. Now prowl her drawers and see if you can locate her makeup junk."

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While she rummaged out in the apartment, I played with my idea. By the time she came back, I had figured it out.

"That's strange," Barbara reported. "There isn't any makeup around. Oh, my God, Chick."

She said it very loud as I got the medicine cabinet off and started tapping at the metal backing. "I should have caught on when I was in Kelly's bathroom and saw the reflection of the Tactical cop in the front doorway. It's the same in this apartment. The john has a view of the front door. Buffy's bathroom is back to back with Kelly's and—"

The metal behind the medicine cabinet finally gave way and there was one hell of a lot of noise, because I had knocked the glass shelves in Kelly's cabinet into the sink. "There you are, Barbara, a way into an apartment that any good architect like Kelly could figure out. Kelly must have cut the back out of her cabinet and then cut through Buffy's when Buffy wasn't home. When the time was ripe, Kelly shoots her rival through the medicine-cabinet opening, tosses the gun into the room, then fits both cabinet backs into place. She must have taken all Buffy's stuff out and hid it in her own apartment, to put back later."

"Very clever, Chick my boy," a voice said, giving us both double thrombos. A light came on on the other side of the opening and I was staring into Jaffee's ugly puss.

So I figured it out by knowing women and Jaffee doped it with ballistics and trajectory and all that jazz. My way was definitely more creative.

Jaffee came by the club the other day and actually seemed human. He had a glass of beer at the bar, which might ruin my reputation. Before he got up to go, he gave me that eat-'em-up grin of his and said, "You're very proud of yourself, aren't you, Kelly? Well, I think you were a dope. Or maybe a dupe."

"How so?" I've got to watch him because he's looking for a last laugh.

"You figure the Regan dame was using you as an alibi to prove she had been in her apartment when that shot was heard."

"Sure, but that backfired on her because I am sort of brilliant."

"Yeah, some brilliance. When she gave you her apartment number, did she say 4C or 4D?"

"I don't remember. Somehow I mixed it up and punched the wrong bell."

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"Think about it, funnyman. Maybe she gave you the wrong number on purpose and you were supposed to be standing right outside that door when the bullet went through."

"That's nuts. In fact, if Buffy Roob had used the intercom instead of just buzzing the vestibule-door release, it might have been a different ball game."

"Really? Funny thing about her downstairs doorbell. It was disconnected. But the buzzer to the door of the apartment wasn't."

"So who rang me in?"

"Kelly Regan. She watched the street, and when you entered the hall, she hit her door-release buzzer. You were supposed to go to the wrong door and press the bell so Miss Roob would come to answer it and be in exactly the right position for the shooting. You weren't an alibi, Kelly, you were a working part of the plot. And if you got it, well, we would have spent a lot of time connecting you with the dead woman. With your rep it would have been an easy case."

I smirked and shrugged, but inside, deep down where I live, I shuddered. Learn a lesson from this: always eat in crowded restaurants and be careful who you buzz, baby.

"Q"

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a NEW Raffles adventure by

BARRY PEROWNE

Hark back to London a decade after the turn of the century, back to the days of gaslight, naphtha fog-flares, and clip-clopping hansom cabs; to Lord's, the headquarters of world cricket where they also played jeu-de-paume*; back to great historical figures who loomed so large then and still do today . . . one of Barry Perowne's finest evocations of the period and a rattling-good escapade of A. J. Raffles, the gentleman cracksman, and his chronicler-of-crime, Bunny Manders—and of their sinister adversary, the Tarantula . . .*

RAFFLES AND THE DANGEROUS GAME

by BARRY PEROWNE

All of a sudden, in the fog that blanketed London one midwinter evening, the tall figure of a policeman loomed up at a street corner and, waving a red lantern, brought a hansom jingling to a standstill.

"Sorry, gentlemen," he told the passengers, who happened to be A. J. Raffles and myself, Bunny Manders, "this street is closed."

I had spent the past couple of hours watching Raffles win his match in a tennis tournament in progress at Lord's Cricket Ground, where the building which houses the court for the gentlemanly game of "real" tennis, or *jeu-de-paume,* is for a spectator about the chilliest place in town.

So, being anxious to thaw myself out with a rum toddy or two at my flat, where Raffles would drop me off on the way to his own bachelor chambers in The Albany, I protested to the bobbie.

"But look here," I said to him, "this is Mount Street. I live in this street."

"Well, sir," he replied, "there's been a gas explosion in a house along there on the left."

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"You describe, more or less," I said, startled, "the area where *I* live! Raffles, if you'll excuse me—"

Leaving him to pay off the cabbie, I sprang out of the hansom and, breaking into a run along Mount Street, saw above the roof of some house ahead a dull red glow pulsing in the fog. The glow faded out as I arrived upon the scene, but the gabled roof from which clouds of smoke and steam were now billowing up was that of the very house in which I had my domicile.

I stopped dead, incredulous. The windows of the flat on the top floor, the fourth, and of my own flat on the third floor, were shattered, and a brass-helmeted, thigh-booted fireman was in the act of clambering from a ladder into my living-room.

"Mr. Manders!" a voice called to me.

I looked round. Firemen's lanterns and the lamps of three Fire Brigade vehicles, one of them of the new horseless type, pallidly mitigated the fog, and I saw that the man who had called to me was Hobday, the hall porter of the house. He was talking to three of the residents.

"Who would have thought it?" said Hobday, as I went over to him. "A gas explosion in *Mount* Street, sir! In the top flat, it was—Major Torrington's, just above yours, Mr. Manders. The Major was out at the time—still is."

"Luckily for him," said Charles Chastayne, who occupied the other flat on my floor. A typical man-about-town, who played cards in the best clubs and probably, I suspected, derived his income from it, he was in evening dress, his cape and silk hat blotched with some sort of white stuff. "I'd only just come in, Manders"; he told me; "when the big bang shook the whole house."

"Anyone hurt?" asked Raffles, who had joined us.

"No, sir," said Hobday. "I had my hands full getting Lady Davencourt an' her marmosets out of her first-floor flat, into a cab an' off to her sister's. But, my word, I was worried about Miss Van Heysst here, who's unfamiliar with the premises as yet. It was lucky a few lights stayed on for a minute or two, or she mightn't 'ave found her way out, plunged in the dark, an' come over panicky, bein' foreign."

"I do not at all panic in the least, Mr. Hobday—*though foreign*," said Miss Marika Van Heysst, whose accent was as charming as her person and who had moved recently into the flat below mine. "Only, see now how it is with us! We have run out safely, yes, but the firemen say we cannot go back in. We say, for how long? They

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only shake their heads. So we are become refugees in the fog, and your London fog is so *cooold!*"

She drew more closely about her a cloak like Red Riding Hood's, but Miss Van Heysst's cloak, its hood framing her enchanting young face and flaxen hair, was as blue as her forlorn, appealing eyes.

"You make a sensible point, Miss Van Heysst," agreed the man who occupied the other flat on her floor. A handsome naval officer with a staff job at the Admiralty, he was in uniform, his cap and greatcoat marred here and there with white smears. "Since we're not allowed back in the house," he said, "there's no point in our standing here in the cold. Miss Van Heysst, may I suggest that I seek a cab for you and escort you to a hotel I know of?"

"Oh, Commander Rigby, that would be kind, for if I am lost in the fog alone and meet with your Jack the Ripper, then yes, I panic very much—being foreign," said Miss Van Heysst, with a flash of her lovely eyes at Hobday as she accepted Clifford Rigby's proffered arm and went off with him into the fog.

"You can trust the Navy with a pretty young woman," said Chastayne, the cardplayer. "Or can you?" He shrugged cynically. "No business of mine. I must go and find somewhere to pig it temporarily myself. Good night, Manders."

Only then, as Chastayne left us, did it dawn on me that the white smears on his evening-cape and on Rigby's greatcoat must have been caused by ceiling plaster falling when the explosion shook the house—and a sudden thought threw my mind into a cerebral commotion.

"Raffles," I blurted, "I'll just pop up to my flat—see the damage."

He gripped my arm, restraining me. "Nonsense, Bunny, you won't be allowed in. You can have my spare room in The Albany. I take it your goods and chattels are insured, so you've nothing to worry about."

But I knew otherwise—knew it so damnably well that I did not sleep a wink in his spare room and, while still the lamps were dim yellow blurs in the murk of what passed for dawn, I inserted my key into the front-door lock of the now silent house in Mount Street.

In the dark hall I stood listening. All was still. I struck a match. The light quivered on the walls of the water-drenched, chaotic hall. On a coffer stood a candelabrum with three unused

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candles in it. Their wicks spluttered wetly but finally lit and, my heart thumping, I stole up the stairs.

The sodden carpet was blotched with plaster-white bootprints all the way up to the second floor, where my candles showed the landing littered with chunks, still wet, of lath-and-plaster. The ceiling must have come down at the moment of the explosion, and down with the ceiling must have come a package of mine—a package so private that, under a sawn section of floorboard in a corner of my living-room immediately above this landing, I had kept the package hidden on the laths between the floor-beams. I peered up, holding my candles higher, and their light showed me the exposed floor-beams and, dangling down from a hole between them, a corner of my water-soaked carpet.

My package must have fallen, with the lath-and-plaster, onto this second-floor landing. I searched vainly through the debris lying here, then crept on up to my living-room, which was a shambles, and checked the hole from above. But there was no possible doubt about it. My package was gone.

I slunk out of the house. I had rather have blown out my brains than tell Raffles what I had now to tell him, but I forced myself to walk back to The Albany, where I found him at breakfast in his chambers.

The lights were on, a coal fire burned cheerfully in the grate, and Raffles, immaculate in tweeds, a pearl in his cravat, his keen face tanned, his dark hair crisp, looked up from *The Times* propped against the coffee-pot.

"Chafing-dishes on the sideboard, Bunny. Ring for more toast."

"I don't want any," I said. I sat down. "Raffles, I've had a shock. Due to that damned explosion last night, some private papers of mine have—gone astray. They were wrapped in a yellow silk muffler patterned with red *fleurs-de-lys,* the package tied with cord, the knot sealed with red wax."

"A colourful package, Bunny, and valuable-looking. Some fireman at work in your flat has probably spotted the package and taken charge of it for you. What *are* these papers—or are they so private you'd rather not tell me?"

"I'd rather not tell you," I said, "but I must. Raffles, you know that ever since we were at school together I've had a sort of—well, a compulsion to write? If one has that sort of compulsion, one naturally writes about things that have made a strong impression on one's mind. Somehow, writing them down is the only way one

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can get them *off* one's mind—especially if they're things it would be suicide to talk about to other people. So these private writings of mine are accounts, no names or details changed or omitted, of some—recent experiences of ours."

"*Ours*?"

"Raffles," I muttered, "that package contains full accounts of six of our—criminal adventures."

Silence. Only the rustle of the fire in the grate, the quiet ticking of the clock above it. Then I heard Raffles cross to the fireplace. I thought it was to get the poker, and my scalp tingled in anticipation of a terminal impact upon it. But he was only lighting a cigarette with a spill. I sensed him standing there on the hearthrug, his grey eyes looking down at me, studying me with a clinical detachment. At last he spoke, his tone even.

"I now know, Bunny," he observed, "why it's said, of people with the strange compulsion to write, that they've been *'bitten by the tarantula.'* "

He asked me then for further details, and I explained that the package, which did not have my name on the outside, must have been found on the second-floor landing.

"Raffles," I said, "your cricket's made your name very well known. If whoever's found that package opens it to see whom it belongs to, and sees your name in a criminal context on every page of those manuscripts, the finder may hand them to the police!"

"Who, if they once start inquiries," Raffles said, "could be a bit awkward."

"We must get out of the country—immediately!"

"And, not knowing whether the police have or have not got that package, have to spend the rest of our lives in Callao?"

"Why Callao, Raffles?"

"Because, as the famous rhyme says, Bunny: 'Under no condition is extradition allowed from Callao'! No, we've got to try to trace your package. It may be unopened. We'd better not make overt inquiries in person. I'll get Ivor Kern, our invaluable 'fence,' to put some of his snoops on to this. Take a room at your club, Bunny. A red light glows for us in the fog. If the light should glow redder still, I'll get word to you. Meantime, keep a suitcase packed handy for instant travel."

All the things in my flat had been ruined by water from firehouses. I had to buy a suitcase and new togs. And towards the

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end of a week of torturing suspense, I returned to my club after a fitting at my tailor's and was told that Raffles was waiting for me in the Hastings Room.

I hared up the handsome marble staircase and found Raffles, alone except for a whisky-and-soda, sitting in a saddlebag chair under a dismal great painting, *The Trial of Warren Hastings*.

"Well, Bunny," Raffles greeted me, "we've had a communication."

"From the police?"

"No," said Raffles. "From the Tarantula."

He handed me a large envelope, which had been opened, and with shaking hands I drew out the contents—about 40 pages of my own handwriting, held together with a paper clip.

"One of your six manuscripts," Raffles said. "Came in my mail this morning. No message with it. None needed. The sender holds five more of your writings. This one, obviously, is to serve notice on us."

"Notice?"

"Of the Bite To Come," Raffles said.

It came three agonizing days later. It was another of my manuscripts. Raffles showed it to me in the Hastings Room. Attached to the manuscript was a typewritten message:

"To A. J. Raffles, Esq.:—

"There now remain in the hands of the present writer four further manuscripts from the pen of your confederate, the ineffable Manders.

"To hand these manuscripts to Scotland Yard, and so end the career of an individual who, little suspected of being a criminal, frequents high social and sporting circles, would be less to the purpose of the present writer than to exchange the manuscripts in return for services rendered.

"Here, Mr. Raffles, is the particular service required of you:

"Sir Roderick Naismith, a pillar of the British Treasury, frequently has with him, when he leaves his office in the evening, a small dispatch-case. Invariably is this so on Friday evenings, when no doubt his dispatch-case contains matter for study in his Hampstead home over the week-end.

"In winter, however, Sir Roderick does not go directly home, but proceeds in a cab to Lord's Cricket Ground, where, at 6.30 on Friday evenings, he exercises himself at the aristocratic game of 'real' tennis.

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"To you, Mr. Raffles, a familiar of that exclusive haunt of the nobility and squirearchy, the building which houses the 'real' tennis court at Lord's, an opportunity to acquire Sir Roderick's dispatch-case should readily present itself.

"On Friday evening, therefore, you will obtain that dispatch-case. You will then return to your chambers in The Albany, where, it has been ascertained, the window of your chambers at the rear of the building overlooks Vigo Street. You will place in that window of yours, as a signal that the service has been duly rendered, a reading-lamp with a green shade. You will then receive, by second post the following day, instructions regarding arrangements for the exchange of Sir Roderick's dispatch-case in return for your confederate's manuscripts.

"Failure on your part to carry out the specified service will result in the delivery of your partner's manuscripts to Scotland Yard."

"Oh, dear God!" I said.

"Sir Roderick Naismith's match at Lord's on Friday evening," Raffles said, "is one in the intermediate stages of the tennis tournament. He'll be playing against a distinguished soldier, a Field-Marshal—Kitchener of Khartoum." Raffles' eyes glittered. "Bunny, the Tarantula—so to call that unknown person—has made a significant slip in this missive, a slip that may well indicate a curious element in this whole situation. The ball's now in my court—and I intend to play it."

"How?"

"By doing, more or less, as the Tarantula demands," Raffles said. "But, Bunny, I think you'd do well to keep out of this from here on."

"I got you into the situation," I said, "and I damned well intend to see it through with you—come what may."

He raised his glass to me.

So the following evening, Friday, found us arriving together, in one of those taximeter-cabs currently challenging the supremacy of London's hansoms and "growlers," at Lord's, the headquarters of world cricket.

The stands and terraces, gaily stippled in summer with the confetti hues of men's blazers and ladies' parasols, loomed now deserted, spectral in the persistent fog. Only from the tennis-court building, in its secluded corner of the famous demesne, did gleams of gaslight faintly mitigate the dank, muffling vapour.

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Capped and ulstered, we entered the building. Just inside the entrance stood a glass case. In this was housed the token trophy of the tournament—token only, as it was one of the priceless treasures at Lord's and never left the ground. Warped, time-blackened, wormeaten, the long-handled, curved, stringless old racquet in the glass case was a reminder of that long ago day when a monarch of France had presented to a monarch of England, as they met in conclave among the pennoned pavilions and glittering shields and lances of the armoured chivalry of both nations, on a French meadow, a gift of tennis balls.

Now, from the unseen court to our left, sounded hollow thuds and bangs, and from the changing-room, to our right, emerged a wiry man carrying a huge basket loaded to the brim with tennis balls of a type little changed since that far-off day of the two monarchs.

" 'Evening, Mole," said Raffles.

"Good evening, Mr. Raffles," said Mole, the resident professional. "Come to see the match? Lord Kitchener and Sir Roderick Naismith are in the court now, warming up. I'm just going in to mark for them."

He went off with his heavy basket, and Raffles strolled over to the door of the changing-room, glanced in casually, then returned to me.

"Just three men in there, Bunny," he murmured. "Let's hope they decide presently to watch the match. Meantime, we'll watch it ourselves."

Gripping my arm, he opened a door to the left, closed it behind us, and in the almost total darkness of the restricted space for spectators steered me to the rearmost of a half-dozen spartan benches. Through the interstices of a protective net I saw the reflector-shaded, wire-caged gaslights which from aloft shed down their brilliance solely on to the court proper, a stylized version of a barnyard of some ancient abbey in the Avignon of Pope Joan, or Cahors of the turreted bridge, or grey-walled Carcassonne of the many candlesnuffer towers.

But whereas medieval monks, banging balls at each other across a net slung between the monastery cow byre and the barn wall, had played this tennis stripped to their hairshirts, the two gentlemen now in the court here—one of the only eight such courts in England, including Henry VIII's at Hampton Court—were in white flannels and sweaters.

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"In these troubled times, Bunny," Raffles murmured, "when a European monarch's keeping half of the world nervous by his rapid expansion of his High Seas Fleet, it's good to see Kitchener looking fit."

I nodded, my gaze on the powerful figure, granite jaw, heavy moustache, and challenging steel-blue eyes of the great soldier, with whom the distinguished senior civil servant, gaunt, grey-haired, shrewd-faced Sir Roderick Naismith of the Treasury, markedly contrasted.

From the marker's niche to the left of the court, where a section of penthouse roof simulated the eaves of a cow byre, Mole appeared, carrying his basket of tennis balls, which he emptied into a trough that already contained hundreds. And the match now began, but here in the dark I was trying to discern how many shadowy figures were spaced about on the benches in front of Raffles and myself. There were, as far as I could make out, only about half-a-dozen spectators—members here, of course—but presently I became aware of three more men quietly entering. Closing the door behind them, they groped their way to the front bench.

Raffles breathed in my ear, "The three from the changing-room. Sit tight!"

Silent as a ghost, he was gone from my side. I forced myself to keep my eyes on the game. Sir Roderick was serving, sending the ball, struck underhand, sliding along the penthouse roof. The ball, falling at the far end, was emphatically struck back across the centre net by Lord Kitchener. Sir Roderick's return went high, the ball banging hollowly against a piece of wood—shaped like a Gothic arch and simulating a monastery pigeon-cote—on the wall behind Kitchener.

"Fifteen thirty," chanted Mole, the marker, as the players changed ends. "Thirty fifteen—chase four."

The game continued, the players changing ends as service was won or lost. Twanging of racquets, thudding of balls, thumping of plimsolled feet echoed hollowly in the court.

"Better than three," rang the voice of Mole. "Deuce!"

Vicariously, I was with Raffles, breaking now into Sir Roderick's locker in the changing-room. Or surprised red-handed at the job? I did not know. Crypt-cold as it was here in the dark, my gloved hands were clammy with sweat. Because I could not keep a pen out of them, Raffles now risked total ruin—and the

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grim lines of Omar Khayyam rang in my ears: *"The Moving Finger writes, and, having writ—"*

" 'Vantage," chanted Mole. "Game! Game and set to Lord Kitchener!"

The players met in mid-court to mop their faces with towels proffered to them by Mole from his marker's niche between the netted apertures which represented the window-openings of a monastery cow byre. Sir Roderick's pale face looked as cool as ever, but the hero of Khartoum was considerably ruddier as he dried his brow and his heavy great moustache.

"Have at you again, Naismith," I heard him growl.

"Good-oh, Field-Marshal," said Sir Roderick.

Half-way through the second set, I became aware, with a start, of a shadow at my side. Raffles was back.

Neither of us said a word until the match was over, with victory to Kitchener, and we made our way out from the tennis-court building into the fog shrouding the cricket ground, when I ventured to ask Raffles how he had got on.

"I'll tell you when I've thought it over," he said. "Let's see if we can find a cab of some sort. I'm hoping there may be a message for me at The Albany."

When we reached his chambers and with a match he popped the gas-globe alight, we saw an envelope lying on the doormat. He tore the envelope open, read the message enclosed, thrust it into his ulster pocket.

"From Ivor Kern," he said. "Come on, we've a call to make."

"On Ivor?"

"No, Bunny. On the Tarantula!"

He turned out the gas, hurried me out of the building by the front entrance to Albany Courtyard and Piccadilly, where we were fortunate enough to get a cab, a four-wheeler. Telling the cabbie to drop us at the corner of Church Walk, Kensington, Raffles thrust me into the dark, cold interior of the cab and, as the horse jingled us off westward, gave me a cigarette.

"Now, Bunny," he said. "Consider your lost package. On the night of the explosion in the Mount Street house, just three people passed along the second-floor landing in making their hasty exits from the house. Any one of those three could have spotted and snatched up your valuable-looking package—and, oddly enough, when we had our brief conversation with them in the street each of them was wearing a garment which could have concealed the

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package. Charles Chastayne was in evening-dress—with cape. Miss Van Heysst had thrown on a hooded cloak—as blue as her eyes. Commander Rigby was in uniform, with a deep-pocketed Navy greatcoat."

A match flared. We dipped our cigarettes to the flame Raffles held in his cupped hands.

"I had Ivor Kern," he went on, "set his snoops to find out where those three persons had taken up their respective temporary abodes—and keep an eye on them. Then came the Tarantula's missive—with its significant slip, the reference to 'the British Treasury.' Any English person would say, simply, 'the Treasury.' So here was a hint that the writer of the Tarantula missive was a foreigner—and one of our three suspects is a foreigner."

"Miss Van Heysst!"

"Yes, but she couldn't have written that letter, Bunny. Her English is charming, but if she'd written that letter there'd have been more slips, more foreign locutions. No, if it were she who snatched up your package, she must have shown it to someone—the person, a foreigner fluent in English and well informed on English ways and values, who wrote the Tarantula letter. So who—and what—*is* this person with the very sharp bite?"

Our cab was jingling past the muffled gaslamps and flickering fog-flare braziers of Hyde Park Corner.

"And just what," Raffles said, "is the youthful, seductive Miss Van Heysst? A new resident, she moves into a flat adjoining that of Commander Clifford Rigby. A gas explosion puts them on the street. At whom, Bunny, was Miss Van Heysst's forlorn plea of fearing to meet Jack the Ripper in the fog subtly directed, and who takes it up with the gallantry to be expected of the Navy and promptly tucks Little Blue Riding Hood under his wing? Commander Rigby. And what, in these times when the clang of shipbuilders' hammers is resounding threateningly to us across the North Sea, is Rigby? He's a naval officer—*with a staff job at the Admiralty*."

"Oh, dear God!" I said.

"What an adroit little opportunist," said Raffles, "is Miss Van Heysst! But, Bunny, though it seemed to me that a curious element was beginning to creep into this matter of your lost manuscripts, it struck me as odd that the Tarantula was anxious to view the documents in a dispatch-case of a senior civil servant at the *Treasury*. If the Tarantula is what I was beginning to suspect,

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it would have been more understandable if the documents he wanted stolen belonged to, say, Field-Marshal Lord Kitchener. Why those of a senior civil servant at the *Treasury*? I decided to have a look at Sir Roderick's documents, in the changing-room at Lord's this evening, and find out."

"And you did?"

"I did," said Raffles. "Naturally, I left the documents intact and Sir Roderick's dispatch-case and locker relocked. What the Tarantula, as a foreigner, doesn't realise is that a member at Lord's does *not,* however dire his need, rob another member. It's simply not done. But a brief skim through Sir Roderick's documents made all plain to me. He's an impostor."

"Sir Roderick Naismith an impostor? Raffles, that's incredible!"

"But true, Bunny. He's a senior civil servant, but not at the Treasury. That ostensible occupation of Sir Roderick's is a mask for his real one. He's the head of our Secret Security Service."

"I never knew we had such a thing!"

"How could you?" said Raffles. "It's secret." He peered out into the fog. "We'll be arriving any minute now," he said, and he went on, "I've no doubt now that the Tarantula is a spymaster. He's evidently learned Sir Roderick's real occupation. And what the Tarantula is anxious to find out is whether any of the agents whose activities in this country he directs and controls are under suspicion. And, significantly enough, Bunny, in Sir Roderick's dispatch-case there's a pencilled list of five names, each with some personal particulars noted against them. The list is headed: 'For expulsion from England subject to Firm Evidence of Espionage Activity.' Among the names is that of Miss Van Heysst of Mount Street. But *not* the name of the Tarantula."

"You know his name, then?"

"It's in the note I had just now from Ivor Kern," Raffles said. "One of his snoops, who'd traced Miss Van Heysst to a respectable hotel, Garland's, near the Haymarket Theatre, was keeping an eye on her. It seems that this afternoon she went, by a circuitous route, to Richmond Park, a place usually deserted on a foggy afternoon. She met a man at the Priory Lane gate, had a brief talk with him. As I'd instructed, any person she met with was to be followed. So Ivor's snoop followed the man. He lives on the first floor of Number Eight, Church Walk, Kensington. So we're now about to visit him in his spidery lair," Raffles said, "and return his Tarantula bite!"

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We were, as always, unarmed, and I was taut with apprehension as Raffles paid off our cab at the corner of Church Walk and we walked along that silent side-street. Here and there, dim light from curtained windows faintly blurred the fog.

"Here we are, Bunny," Raffles said, "that house with the number 8 barely visible on the front-door fanlight. He's probably in that first-floor where faint edges of light show around the window-curtains. No doubt he's waiting impatiently for word from whatever minion he has skulking in Vigo Street, at the back of The Albany, that a green-shaded reading-lamp has appeared at the window of my chambers. H'm! Now, how're we to trap this hairy Tarantula?" Raffles thought for a moment. "Tell you what, Bunny. We'll get him worried. Got plenty of small change in your pocket?"

"A fair amount, Raffles."

"Good. Now, I'm going to try that front door. It'll probably be locked, but may not be bolted—in which case the little implement I used on Sir Roderick's locker at Lord's should serve our purpose. If I can get into the house, you keep well back in the fog and toss coins up at that first-floor window. The man's almost certainly armed, so my prudent course will be to steal in on him from behind when his back's turned as he peers out of the window."

Instantly grasping Raffles' strategy, I whipped off my gloves, took a handful of small change from my pocket as he moved silently up the two steps to the door under the dim fanlight. As I watched his shadowy figure at work on the door, a vertical line of light suddenly appeared there—and vanished instantly as Raffles, entering, soundlessly closed the door.

Drawing back into the fog, I tossed up a coin at the first-floor window. I heard a tinkle against the glass, a second tinkle as the coin dropped down into the railed basement area. No movement of the curtains ensued, so I tossed up another coin—another—and another. Suddenly, the faint lines of light that edged the window-curtains vanished. Drawing back further into the fog, I sensed, my heart thumping, that the curtains had been parted a little and that some evil, spider-like creature, crouching there at the window of the now dark room, was glaring out balefully into the fog.

Listening intently, I heard no sound from within the room, but I saw the light go on again. For a second Raffles showed himself to me between the curtains, then he closed them. I waited, swal-

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lowing with a parched throat. It seemed a long wait before the front door of the house silently opened and closed, and Raffles rejoined me.

We picked up a cab in Kensington High Street, and Raffles gave the cabbie an address in Hampstead.

"I'm afraid, Bunny," he said, "I had to violate a rule of ours and use a modicum of violence. I banged the Tarantula's head hard against his floor, to stun him while I relit the gaslight he'd turned out. Still, he was beginning to come round as I left. He'll find he's lost your four manuscripts. They were on his desk. Here they are, still loosely wrapped in your yellow silk muffler.

"There was a locked drawer in his desk. The lock presented no problem. So we're richer by about one thousand pounds—spies' wages, I imagine. I also abstracted from the drawer a batch of the Tarantula's papers—which provide, I fancy, all the 'firm evidence' Sir Roderick Naismith needs to justify some expulsions from this country. I noticed Sir Roderick's Hampstead address on letters in his document-case at Lord's, so we'll drop these papers he needs through his letter-box, then drive to Piccadilly Circus and see if we can buy a few flowers."

I was at a loss to divine why he should want flowers at this hour. However, late as it was when we got back from our Hampstead errand and paid off our cab in Piccadilly Circus, we found this hub of London an oasis of activity in the blanketing fog. The theatres and music-halls were disgorging their second-house audiences, the gin palaces their inebriates, into the blurred glow from gaslights and the naked flicker of naphtha fog-flares.

Police whistles shrilled above the clip-clop of hoofbeats, harness-jingle of hansoms, fourwheelers, and rumbling omnibuses, and mingled with the honking of occasional taximeter-cabs and the raucous cries of the Piccadilly flower women sitting beside their big baskets at their usual receipt of custom on the steps of the Eros statue.

"Oy, misters, you gents there!" A cheeky-looking wench, much shawled and petticoated, with a feather boa, a huge hat bedecked with ostrich plumes, and high-heeled button boots, brandished a great bunch of chrysanthemums at Raffles and myself. "Out lyte, you are! Bin on the spree, you two 'ave! You'd best tyke a few flowers 'ome—beautiful chrysanths, fresh as a dysy—to sweeten yer little bit o' trouble-an'-strife!"

"On behalf of my friend here," said Raffles, "I'll give you a

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sovereign for that fine bunch of chrysanthemums, and if you'd care for an extra half-bar, you can deliver them for him at your leisure. The place is not far. It's just off the Haymarket there—a hotel called Garland's. Hand the flowers in at the desk and say they're for Miss Van Heysst, as a *bon voyage* gift from A Gentleman of Mount Street. Are you on?"

"Mister, for an extra 'arf-bar, the w'y tryde's bin to-night in this bleedin' fog," said the wench, "I'd walk as far as Seven Dials for yer wiv me whole bloody basket!"

So Raffles gave her the extra half-sovereign and, raising our caps to the wench, we walked across the misty Circus towards the nearby Albany.

"There are games, Bunny, *and* games," Raffles remarked thoughtfully. "'Real' tennis is an old one, but espionage is an older one still—and much more dangerous. As far as women are concerned, only a brave woman would play it. It's to be hoped that Miss Van Heysst doesn't continue her activities in the pay of the Wilhelmstrasse, or—in the troubled state of Europe to-day—she may come to a bad end. That would be a pity, because she's not only an exceptionally attractive and very young woman, but also a brave one."

"Yes," I said.

"So I think, Bunny," Raffles said, "although she was a fellow resident of yours in Mount Street for only a short while, it would be nice for her to have a small tribute of flowers from you, to take with her when Sir Roderick Naismith has her escorted aboard the Harwich to Hook-of-Holland boat to-morrow. I wish we'd seen more of her. She's a most interesting person. According to some particulars against her name in Sir Roderick's list, her real surname is Zeller—and she's believed to use aliases other than Van Heysst."

"Other aliases?" I said.

He nodded.

"One of them, noted against our Little Blue Riding Hood in Sir Roderick's list, is rather striking," Raffles said. "Mata Hari."

"Q"

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a NEW Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

If there's one kind of case that Captain Leopold, head of the Department of Violent Crimes, has a special knack for, it's old unsolved murders, no matter how cold the trail. This time it's the Carl Shaeffer case that baffled Captain Brice Haggard, Leopold's predecessor, fourteen years ago. But the more Leopold sniffed around, looking for an overlooked clue, questioning the people who had been involved, the ice-colder the trail became . . . But as the Captain reminds us: "The past is always with us" . . .

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD TRIES AGAIN

by EDWARD D. HOCH

It was Fletcher who brought the word that Brice Haggard was downstairs and wanted to see him. For Captain Leopold the name stirred up memories of his first days on the force, when he'd come up from New York to replace Brice as head of Homicide.

Things had been different in those days. For one thing, the Department was called Homicide rather than Violent Crimes. And for another, the Police Association hadn't yet developed the political clout to demand promotions from within the Department. Leopold had been a homicide detective in Manhattan when they hired him. That sort of hiring for a top position couldn't happen today, but the fact that he was a local lad—brought up in the city before he moved to New York—had helped him then.

"Brice Haggard." He repeated the name, summoning up a vision of the man he'd met on only two or three occasions during the transition period 14 years ago.

"Says it's important, Captain. Says he came all the way up from Florida to see you."

"Of course I'll see him," Leopold said, sorry for his hesitation. "Send him up."

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Haggard did not look a great deal different after 14 years, but perhaps that was because he'd already seemed old the first time Leopold saw him. Until he'd learned differently, Leopold had assumed the man he was replacing was at retirement age. Actually Haggard was only 59 at the time—which made him 73 now. His hair was white and he wore it quite short, as he always had. Now, in contrast to the Florida tan, the hair seemed almost nonexistent. He was still a big man, running a bit to a pouch around the middle, but on the whole retirement seemed to have been good to him.

"How've you been, Brice?" Leopold asked, rising to shake hands.

"Can't complain. Living the good Florida life. How's crime?"

"It's always with us."

Brice Haggard took a seat opposite the desk. "I see they've still got the same crumby furniture in here."

"Two new filing cabinets. And a new coffee machine. That's about it."

"I thought they'd do better by you—bringing you up from New York and all."

"You know the taxpayers. Zoos and jails can always be put off till next year." Leopold leaned back in his chair and smiled. "But what brings you up here? It can't be that you miss our April showers." Haggard glanced at the rain-speckled window. "No, hardly. The truth is, my wife passed away just before Christmas and I've had a lot of time to think. When you're lonely, thinking's about the only thing left to do."

"I know about being lonely," Leopold agreed.

"That's right—you never married?"

"I was married a long time ago, before I came up here. I never tried it a second time."

"I doubt if I could, either. Muriel was a good woman, the only woman for me."

Leopold cleared his throat. "What was it you said brought you up this way?"

"I came to see you, actually. About the Schaeffer case. Remember Carl Schaeffer?"

"Carl Schaeffer?" Leopold repeated the name as if dredging up a muddy hulk from the depths of his memory. Carl Schaeffer . . .

"My last case before I retired. He turned in a wanted bank robber and the press hailed him as a hero. One week later he was shot dead on his way home from work. God, I worked on that case

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day and night for weeks and never came up with a lead. I guess when you took over you didn't have any luck either."

Captain Leopold shook his head. He'd never counted the Schaeffer slaying among his unsolved cases because, after all, it had happened before he came on the job. He'd pursued the investigation, prodded by the press, for several more weeks, until it gradually faded from memory.

"We never cracked that one," Leopold admitted. "The word was that some mob bigwig saw Schaeffer on TV and ordered him hit as a lesson to squealers. But we could never prove it."

Brice Haggard licked his thin lips. "That's why I came back, Leopold. I want to wind up that case."

"After fourteen years?"

"Don't you see? It's the one thing I've left unfinished in life." His voice had taken on a note of pleading.

"Brice, I can assure you I pursued every lead. If we couldn't solve it then, what chance have we now?"

Haggard twisted a bit in his chair. "I'd like your permission to go over the old files, maybe talk to some of the people again."

Leopold knew he couldn't grant that permission, and yet it was hard to turn the old man down after he'd come all the way from Florida. Perhaps he could devote a few hours to inspecting the files with him. "Let's both do it," he suggested. "If there's anything worth pursuing after all these years, we should find it quickly enough."

Haggard nodded. "I'd appreciate that."

On the way out of the office Leopold stopped at Connie Trent's desk. "Brice and I are going down to the basement file room to look through some old records. I don't think you'll need me for anything but if you do, come get me."

She glanced at Haggard and seemed about to question Leopold. But then she thought better of it. "All right, Captain."

They boarded the ancient elevator to the basement. "This thing hasn't changed," Brice remarked. "It never was safe."

"Mostly we use the stairs," Leopold admitted.

"Nice-looking young lady up there. She your secretary?"

"Connie? Oh, no—she's a detective first-grade. She's done some good work for us."

"Times change. In my day we figured it was too tough a job for a woman."

"Times change," Leopold agreed.

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The basement storage room was musty with the odor of old files, and Leopold again wished something could be done about his budget request for microfilming equipment. "These are open homicides more than ten years old," he told Haggard. "Everything more recent is kept upstairs."

"Got many open homicides?"

"One is too many." He pulled open a file drawer and took out a thick manila envelope labeled *Schaeffer, Carl.*

Carl Schaeffer had been a young salesman with a recent bride and a bright future. That future started unraveling 14 years ago on the day he recognized wanted bank robber Sammy Jazell on a downtown bus. He'd phoned the police, who quickly located Jazell in a bar and arrested him. That night and for several days, the local press and television made a hero out of Carl Schaeffer.

A week later, on his way home from work, he'd been gunned down from a passing car almost across the street from his house. He'd died instantly, with a single bullet squarely in the back of his head. The nearest witness had been a block away—a woman scared out of her wits, whose description of the car was maddeningly vague. She'd seen Schaeffer walking on the sidewalk, past a row of parked cars, and had seen him pause for a moment. As he started walking again, a green car came along the street and she heard a single shot. Carl Schaeffer fell to the sidewalk, dead.

The police, under Captain Brice Haggard, had rounded up all Sammy Jazell's known friends and relatives. But he was really a loner, and no one seemed close enough to have taken this sort of revenge. Then the investigation moved into another area—the possibility of some personal motive masquerading as a gangland slaying. Schaeffer's wife was questioned, but they'd only been married a matter of months, so it seemed unlikely she could have developed a motive—or found a lover—that quickly.

The case had remained open, but unsolved. Rumors persisted that a New York mob chief had ordered Schaeffer hit as an example to other police informers, but this had never been proved. Frankly, Leopold doubted it. The whole thing sounded too much like the Schuster killing in New York ten years earlier, when Albert Anastasia was said to have ordered a Brooklyn resident murdered because he helped the police apprehend bank robber Willie Sutton. But Anastasia himself was dead by the time of the Schaeffer killing, gunned down in a barber chair at New York's Park Sheraton Hotel.

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"What about the wife?" Haggard asked, looking up from the thick pile of interviews and autopsy reports. "Is she still around?"

"She's remarried, but I think she's still living in town."

"Could we talk to her?"

Leopold hesitated. How far should he go in humoring the old man? There was no new evidence, no reason to reopen the investigation after all these years. "I don't know . . ."

"Look," Haggard argued, "did we ever look into the possibility that her second husband might have been involved? Maybe he was a jealous rival who gunned down Schaeffer to get his wife. She might never have known about it."

Leopold flipped through some follow-up reports till he came to a report of her remarriage. The man's name was Jonathan Windless, and he owned a chain of sporting goods stores in the area. Since the marriage hadn't taken place till two years after Schaeffer's murder, the second husband had never been questioned about the crime. It was an angle, something that just might be worth checking out.

"All right," Leopold said. "Let's go talk to Windless."

The main store of the Windless chain was located in a large shopping center that sprawled over a hundred acres just north of the city. Originally it had specialized in ski equipment, but now the windows featured tennis rackets and golf clubs. Leopold knew that the other stores, south of the city near Long Island Sound, carried boating gear. *Leisure time activities,* the Windless ads proclaimed, *for the whole family.*

"They even carry camping supplies," Leopold observed as he threaded his way through the crowded aisles to the rear of the busy store.

"She married better the second time," Brice Haggard said.

"We'll see."

Jonathan Windless was back in the stockroom, supervising the unloading of a shipment of aluminum canoes painted to resemble birchbark. He was a tall man with graying hair that added a touch of dignity to an already handsome face. "Look at this," he said, tapping the metal side of one canoe. "Looks just like the Indians used to make!"

"Do these things float?" Leopold asked.

"Sure do! They're big sellers. Now what can I do for you gentlemen? It sounded mysterious over the phone."

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"I didn't mean it to," Leopold assured him. "This is retired Captain Brice Haggard, my predecessor on Homicide, as it was called then. We're looking into one or two angles in the killing of Carl Schaeffer."

Windless frowned. "Has that been reopened after all these years?"

"Technically it was never closed. I just happened to notice in the records that we'd never talked to you."

Windless shrugged and tapped nervously on the side of the aluminum canoe. "I never knew Schaeffer very well."

"But you did know him?" Haggard pursued.

"I had a small store then, in another location. Schaeffer was a salesman for a line of inflatable pool toys. He called on me, and occasionally I bought from him. That was all."

"Did you know his wife then?"

"No. I met her for the first time at the funeral parlor. Then, about six months later, she came into my store to buy something. We started seeing each other, but it was still a long time before she felt ready to marry again."

"Was Schaeffer in here the day he was murdered?" Leopold asked.

"I don't think so. It's difficult to remember after fourteen years, but I think something like that would have stuck in my memory." He seemed to grow annoyed at the continued questioning. "Look, I'm very busy today and there really isn't anything else I can tell you."

Haggard started to say something but Leopold interrupted. "Thank you for your time, Mr. Windless. I don't think there are any more questions at present."

Brice Haggard followed him reluctantly out of the store.

"You should have let me question him more," Brice insisted once they were back in Leopold's car.

Leopold pulled out of the parking lot into afternoon traffic. "There's nothing, Brice," he told the old man. "We can't just go around questioning people without any leads. The case is too old."

Brice Haggard sat grim-lipped for a time in silence. Then he said, "I suppose you might as well drop me back at my hotel."

"I'm sorry, Brice."

"I know."

He dropped Haggard off, hoping he'd seen the last of him, then

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immediately felt guilty at the thought. Perhaps when he reached that age he'd go around bothering people too.

Connie was waiting for him back at Headquarters. "How'd it go?" she asked.

He shrugged. "A waste of time."

The file on the Schaeffer case was still on his desk and she asked, "Should I put this away?"

"No. Let me glance through it a bit, as long as it's up here."

When Fletcher came in with coffee a half hour later he found Leopold engrossed in the old reports. "Sorry, Captain. I didn't know you were busy."

"That's all right. Come on in, Fletcher. I'm just reading about some ghosts from the past."

"The Schaeffer case?"

"Yeah. They say nostalgia is popular these days and this sure is nostalgic for me. It was the first case waiting for me when I arrived here."

"I remember," Fletcher said. He was new on the force then, newly assigned to the detective division. He'd come in just ahead of Leopold.

"Did you work on the case much, Fletcher?"

"Not really, Captain. Of course in the first few days after he was killed there was such a public uproar just about everyone in the Department was working on some angle of it. I might have talked to a few people, but I was never officially assigned to it."

Leopold flipped through a few more reports and then slid them back into their envelope. He reached for his coffee. "I guess it's a cold trail, Fletcher."

"Did you expect anything else?"

In the morning when Leopold arrived at the office he found Shirley Windless waiting to see him. After 14 years she was still an attractive woman, with long blonde hair that made her seem barely into her twenties.

"Captain Leopold, I'd like to speak with you," she said, intercepting him as he was about to enter his office. "You probably don't remember me. I'm Shirley Windless—Shirley Schaeffer."

"I remember you, Mrs. Windless. Come in."

She settled into the chair opposite his desk but didn't remove her white raincoat. "You were questioning my husband yesterday afternoon."

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"We talked to him, yes."

"Why?"

Leopold shrugged, unable to meet her pale-blue eyes. "We are reviewing some of the open cases."

"I don't believe that. Something's happened, hasn't it? Something about the killing."

"No, not really."

She kneaded her hands together nervously. "I thought I was done with it. I couldn't live through another nightmare."

"There won't be any. I can assure you of that."

"What about the other man? He phoned me last evening."

"What other man? Who phoned you?"

"That old man—Haggard. The one who worked on the case before you."

"What did he say to you?"

"He asked me questions about Carl's killing. Had I seen any suspicious cars following him? Had there been any threatening phone calls to the house? My God, the man talked as if it happened last week!"

Leopold nodded.

"Well, I want to know what it's all about! Are my husband and I under suspicion?"

"No, no, nothing like that. It's mere routine."

"It can be pretty annoying routine after all these years."

"I'm sorry."

"Does Haggard have any official status with your department?"

"Not really, no," Leopold admitted.

She got to her feet. "If he bothers me or my husband again I'm taking this matter to the newspapers. They haven't been writing too kindly about the police in recent months. I'm sure they'd like to sink their teeth into a good case of harassment." With that she turned and left the office.

When Fletcher came in a few moments later he found Leopold staring glumly out the window. "Was it that bad, Captain?"

"Brice Haggard's been bugging her. She's upset, threatening to call in the press."

"That's all we need!"

"Still, Fletcher—"

"Still what?"

"I wonder if she's not overreacting."

"Overreacting because she's got something to hide?"

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"I don't know," Leopold admitted. "I just don't know." Then, "Look, Fletcher, you were here before me, during Haggard's last days. Why did he retire? He was only fifty-nine."

"From what I heard at the time he was squeezed out. They wanted new blood and he could retire on a twenty-year pension. They persuaded him that was the right thing to do."

"Why? What was wrong with him?"

"He had some old-fashioned ideas about crime and law enforcement. A couple of times he was accused of hitting suspects during questioning. The charges were never proven, but City Hall didn't like it."

Leopold went back to staring out the window.

"What are you thinking about, Captain?"

Finally he roused himself. "I'm thinking it's time for some coffee. Go get it, will you, Fletcher?"

Sammy Jazell had a brother who still lived in town, and that afternoon Leopold went to see him. He was a seedy middle-aged drifter who held down a part-time job as a cashier at a city-owned parking garage. His name was Tommy Jazell and he was two years younger than his more famous brother, but like Sammy he could still spot a cop a block away.

"You're Leopold, aren't you? A cop?"

"Captain Leopold of Violent Crimes. You got a few minutes to talk?"

Tommy Jazell signaled to a pretty black-haired girl who took over at the cash register. "So what's the beef?"

"Heard from your brother lately?"

Tommy scratched at his stubble of beard. "Sammy's been out of prison two years now. He's livin' in California, workin' at a used car lot. Goin' straight—y'know?"

"We've been working on the Schaeffer case," Leopold told him.

"Schaeffer? That salesman guy who turned in Sammy?"

"That's the one."

"Hell! I thought you cops had enough work without diggin' up ancient history!"

"You were questioned at the time, weren't you, Tommy?"

"Sure. They thought I did it. But I was playin' cards with a couple o' guys and they alibied me."

"Lucky for you."

"Yeah."

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"But you were probably pretty upset about Sammy being fingered to the cops, weren't you?"

"Sure. He was my brother, wasn't he?" Tommy Jazell took out a crumpled pack of cigarettes. "Besides, the whole thing was fishy from the beginnin'."

"Fishy? What do you mean?"

"Well, that guy Schaeffer, he claimed he spotted my brother on the bus one day, but hell, they knew each other. They played cards together a month before he turned Sammy in. I know—I was in the game too."

"Why didn't you tell about this at the time?"

"Nobody came to see me till after Schaeffer was dead. And what difference did it make then?"

"I don't know," Leopold admitted. He didn't know what difference it made now, either.

"I gotta get back to work. Anything else you want?"

"No," Leopold said. "Thanks for your help."

He was heading back across the street to his car when he saw Brice Haggard. The old man was walking along the side of the parking garage, obviously bound for his own interview with Tommy Jazell.

"Hello, Brice," Leopold called out, changing course to intercept him. "How are you today?"

Haggard nodded a greeting. "I'm all right. You been to see Jazell's brother?"

"Yes," Leopold admitted. "I guess our minds are running in the same groove."

"It took me a while longer to locate him. I don't have all your resources."

"Well, he didn't have much to say, Brice. Sammy is out of jail and living in California."

The old man grunted. "Ironic, isn't it? He's free and Carl Schaeffer is dead."

"Sammy Jazell served twelve years in prison. That's a good chunk of his life."

Haggard started to move away. "I really should see him."

Leopold took his arm gently. "Come on, Brice. There's nothing to be learned here."

Haggard's eyes came up to meet Leopold's. "This is a contest between us, isn't it? A contest to see who solves it first."

"No contest, Brice."

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"They shouldn't have retired me, you know."

"I know."

"Not with the Schaeffer case still open. They should have kept me on until I cracked it. You know, I thought they would. Something that important, I thought they'd keep me on."

A chill was beginning to creep down Leopold's backbone. He didn't want to hear any more. "Come on, Brice. I'll drive you back to your hotel."

"It's not too late to solve it, you know. With murder, it's never too late."

"Don't you worry about it. We'll find the killer, sooner or later." He steered Haggard to his car and opened the door.

"You won't find him. He's too clever for you. I'm the only one who can find him now."

Leopold took a deep breath as he slid behind the wheel. "Go back to Florida, Brice," he said quietly. "This isn't the place for you. It's only full of memories."

Brice Haggard looked sideways at him. "You still don't know, do you? You still don't know who killed Carl Schaeffer!"

"Does it matter, Brice?"

"I killed him, Leopold! Do you hear me? I killed Schaeffer to keep my job! I killed him and nobody ever knew—"

"I was afraid you were going to tell me that," Leopold said.

"What are we going to do with him?" Connie Trent asked. "That poor old man is in the next room dictating a confession!"

"I know," Leopold said sadly.

"Do you honestly think he did it?"

"Stranger things have happened, Connie." He took a sip of coffee but it was already cold. "Haggard was being eased out of the Department, forced to retire at the age of fifty-nine. He resented it, and decided to commit a crime so outrageous that the press and public would demand he stay on to solve it."

She looked him hard in the eye. "Do you believe that, Captain?"

"What's wrong with it, if he says that's what happened?"

"Plenty's wrong with it! If he killed Schaeffer so they'd keep him on to solve the case, what was his next move? He couldn't solve it without arresting himself, or framing some innocent person. And after the excitement died down he'd still be retired. The best evidence that it wouldn't work is that the city *didn't* keep him on—they retired him and brought you in to work on the case. Besides,

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are we to believe that a man who devoted his life to solving crimes would suddenly turn to murder—and for a reason like that?"

"Are we to believe," Leopold countered, "that such a man would confess to a crime he didn't commit?"

"He's had fourteen years to brood about it, Captain. Down in Florida, under that hot sun. His wife dies and suddenly he's all alone. The brooding turns to something else. He comes back to work on the case again, then begins to think he killed Schaeffer himself!"

Leopold sat up in his chair and smiled at her. "You're a smart detective, Connie. That's exactly the sort of reasoning I'd have come up with at your age."

"You think I'm right?"

"I'm older now—closer to Haggard's age than yours. I'm not so sure of things any more."

Lieutenant Fletcher came in carrying a typed statement with a signature at the bottom. "He signed it, Captain. He confessed to the whole thing, in detail. Should I phone the Commissioner?"

"No. Naturally he'd know all the details. He's been thinking about them for fourteen years."

"Then what do we do with him?"

"I want a medical opinion. Call Doc Hastings and get him over here to examine Haggard."

"Is that all you're going to do?" Connie asked.

"No. I'm going to make a phone call to California."

It took some time to obtain the telephone number of Sammy Jazell, and a good deal of time after that before Leopold heard the former bank robber's voice on the other end of the line.

"How'd you find me?" Sammy wanted to know.

"You're not that hard to locate, Sammy. Your brother said you were in California, and I contacted your parole officer to find out just where in California."

"You gonna arrest me by long distance?" he asked, chuckling into the phone.

"Just ask you a question." Leopold had only seen Sammy Jazell once during his trial 14 years ago, but in his mind now he conjured up a picture of the stocky unkempt man.

"Ask away."

"Remember Carl Schaeffer?"

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"How could I forget!" A dry humorless chuckle, and then, "If you're gonna ask, did I kill him, the answer is no. I didn't have it done and I don't know who did it."

"That wasn't the question."

"Oh."

"Your brother says you knew Carl earlier, that you played cards with him."

"Sure, once or twice."

"Did he owe you money?"

"How'd you know that?"

"Just a guess."

"He was into me for about five hundred."

"Then you must have been doubly upset when he turned you in."

"Sure, I was upset! But then somebody killed him and I forgot about it."

"No idea who shot him?"

"None."

"Your brother Tommy?"

"Hell, Tommy never did me a favor in his life!"

"All right," Leopold said. "That's all I wanted. Come back and see us sometime."

"Fat chance!"

Leopold went into the little interrogation room where Fletcher was talking with Brice Haggard. "How are you feeling, Brice?"

"All right. Now that I've got it off my chest."

"Brice, I want you to talk about the killing. I want you to tell me everything you remember about it."

"I put it all in the statement."

"Tell me anyway."

"I killed him. I shot him from the car."

"I read that part, Brice. I want details. How fast was the car going? Which hand did you shoot with?"

"I was waiting in my car at the bus stop. When I saw him get off I followed slowly behind him and then shot him."

"With which hand?"

"My right. I'm right-handed. I fired through the open right-hand window of my car."

"While your left hand was on the steering wheel?"

"Yes. I kept driving. I never stopped the car."

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"I see. What about Schaeffer? He was a salesman. He needed a car for his calls. How come he took the bus?"

"He drove a company car on his calls and took a bus to and from the office. He left his own car at home."

"If they'd kept you on, Brice, how would you have wound it up? How would you have solved it?"

Haggard looked blank. "I guess I didn't think ahead about that."

Leopold leaned close to the old man. "Brice, I've got a doctor coming to see you shortly. We don't want your confession. We don't think you killed Carl Schaeffer."

"But I *did*!" he insisted.

"Look, Brice," Leopold said, speaking softly as one might in reasoning with a child. "Carl Schaeffer was shot squarely in the back of the head, from behind. To catch him at that angle, the killer had to be behind him, either on foot or leaning far out of the right-hand car window. With a hand on the steering wheel you just couldn't do it. By the time you got the car in a position where you could shoot him from the driver's seat through the open right window you'd have been next to him, not behind him. Sure, he might have seen you and turned to run, but then his body would have fallen on the grass, not forward onto the sidewalk."

"I—"

Leopold got to his feet. "Talk to the doctor, Brice. I'll see you later."

He left and returned to his office. It was almost evening. The shifts were changing and Connie Trent was standing by the door. "You want me to stay?"

"No. You can go, Connie. Nothing's going to break here."

"I was hoping—"

"If the Schaeffer case was that easy we'd have nailed it fourteen years ago."

"Haggard?"

"He didn't do it, even if he thinks he did. You were right."

"I'm glad."

He turned back to his desk. "See you in the morning, Connie."

The Windless home was in a fashionable suburb, near the water. Looking at its white colonial exterior, Leopold pegged it in the $100,000 range. Business must be good for the Windless chain, he decided.

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Shirley Windless came to the door, stared out at Leopold and said, "My husband's not home. He's working at one of the stores."

"I didn't want to see him. I wanted to talk with you."

"Well . . ." She hesitated a few moments, then said, "Come in."

"Nice house you have here."

"We like it."

"Much larger than your first husband's home."

She shot him a glance. "Carl was a salesman. His earnings were never very high."

"And what he did earn he gambled away."

"Who told you that?"

"The Jazell brothers, as a matter of fact."

She moved behind a padded bar at the far end of the living room. "Can I fix you a drink, or are you on duty?"

"I'm not on duty, but no, thanks."

"Is that all you came for, to dredge up the past some more?"

"The past is always with us. It's particularly with me right now because I have a man trying to confess to your husband's murder."

Even from across the room he could see her turn pale at his words. "Who is it?"

"That needn't concern you—I'm convinced he didn't do it."

"Do you know who did?"

"Yes. And so do you."

"Are you implying that I had a hand in his death?"

"Mrs. Windless, I came here for the truth. After fourteen years I think it's time you told it."

"What sort of truth?"

"About what really happened to your first husband. He wasn't shot from any moving car, and I should have realized it at the time. There's only evidence of one shot having been fired, and it would have taken a crack marksman or a very lucky person to have killed him with one bullet from a moving vehicle.

"But more than that, there were cars parked along that side of the street—it's in the evidence. So the moving vehicle couldn't have been right next to the curb when the shot was fired. Yet Carl was shot squarely in the back of the head. The killer must have been behind him—not on the sidewalk, but in one of those parked cars.

"The murder car never sped away. It just sat there at the curb. The police never questioned its being there because it belonged

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there. It belonged to you and Carl. You were in that car, Shirley, and you shot your first husband."

"You believe that? You believe I murdered him?"

"Murder is a very strong word, and I think that's a question only you can answer. Perhaps, in this crazy cockeyed world of ours, Carl Schaeffer was truly a man who murdered himself."

"Then you know," she said simply.

Leopold sighed. It was late and he was tired. "I know that a witness saw Carl pause on the sidewalk, stand stock-still for a moment or two, then start walking again. Why? Well, what happened as he continued walking? A car came along and a shot was fired. Since I've already shown that the shot couldn't have come from that car, we can only conclude that Carl paused in that exact spot to *wait* for a car to come along. Carl *knew* he was going to be shot, but not from a passing car."

"Yes," she said, nodding.

"By you, because he trusted you with his life."

"Yes."

"Tell me."

"I'd been married to him such a short time, and I guess I didn't really know him at all. I certainly didn't know about his compulsive gambling until he told me. It was just after he'd turned in Sammy Jazell and the papers had made a big thing out of it. I noticed he was very nervous and I asked what the trouble was. Then he told me everything. He hadn't recognized Jazell on a bus at all. He'd been playing cards with him and had lost five hundred dollars. There was no way he could pay it, so he told the police where Jazell was. But now he was afraid. Jazell had a brother who might come after him, might even try to kill him."

"So he asked you to shoot him?"

Shirley Windless nodded. "He'd bought a gun some time back at one of the sporting goods stores he called on. We'd gone out shooting at bottles and tin cans a few times, and he said I was a good shot. I suppose that's what gave him the idea. He wanted me to hide in our car and wait till he came home. Then, while a car was passing on the street, I was to shoot him in the arm. I'd duck down beneath the dashboard and it would look as if he'd been shot from the passing car. When a crowd started to gather, I'd slip out of our car on the driver's side, hiding the gun under the seat."

"And that's what you did?"

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She nodded somberly. "No one noticed me getting out, and even if they had, they were already convinced the gunman's car was gone. They thought I'd run over from across the street, from our house. The next day I tossed the gun in the river."

"But you shot him in the head, not the arm."

"What can I say? I missed? I was aiming at him with the gun, knowing what he wanted me to do. He was convinced if someone else took a shot at him, that would scare Jazell's brother away. He'd have police guards and the heat would be on. And it would help make him more of a hero too. I think he was a little bit crazy then. I remember thinking that as I aimed the gun. Any man who'd beg to be shot in the arm—even to save himself from being murdered—had to be a little crazy. I thought about that, and his gambling, and his lies, and some other unpleasant things about our first months of marriage."

"Did you kill him deliberately, Shirley?"

"I—I don't know, I truly don't!" She looked at Leopold helplessly. "I've thought about it for fourteen years, and I just don't know!"

"Have you told your present husband?"

"No." She got up, fumbling for a cigarette. "Will you arrest me now?"

"There's no evidence," he said quietly. "Not really." He stood up to leave. "I told you I was off duty. If you ever decide to make an official statement, you know where to find me."

She seemed very still for a moment, not daring to breathe. Then she said, very simply, "Thank you."

On the way home Leopold wondered what the doctor would say about Brice Haggard. And he wondered what he would say to the old man. That he'd tried to solve the case again, and that he'd failed again?

Some cases never end—even after they've been solved.

"Q"

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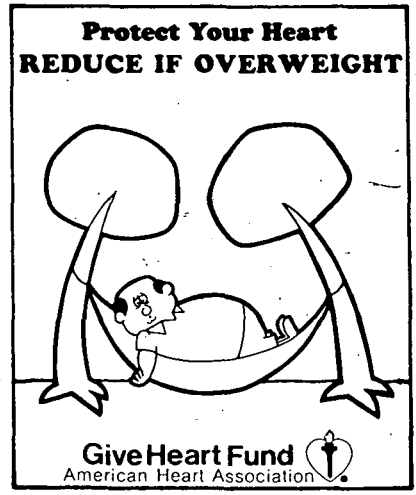

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